

POLITICS AND THE MOVING IMAGE:
CONTEMPORARY GERMAN AND AUSTRIAN CINEMA
THROUGH THE LENS OF
BENJAMIN, KRACAUER AND KLUGE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis charts the trajectory of a strand of film-theoretical optimism in texts by Walter Benjamin (1882-1940), Siegfried Kracauer (1889-1966) and Alexander Kluge (1932–) from different moments in the twentieth century; the empirical corpus looks to post-reunification German and Austrian cinema to find evidence of this theoretical optimism in contemporary filmmaking practices. The thinkers advocate the leftist-political potential of film to stimulate a critical mode of spectatorship, and are to varying degrees influenced by Brecht and the neo-Marxist politics of the *Frankfurter Institut für Sozialforschung*. The objective of this thesis is thus twofold. First, it illustrates the continuing relevance of the following principal strands in the film-theoretical texts of Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge: the representation of the figure of the worker in the *Arbeiterfilm* genre; the possibilities and limits of capturing reality using different modes of realism; the imperative of challenging viewers in order to transform them from ‘consumers’ into collaborators; and, following on from this, notions of shock and distraction, focusing on Benjamin’s concept of the ‘Schockwirkung’. Second, it shows how this diachronic, neo-Marxist approach can continue to illuminate facets of the political in contemporary cinema by German-speaking directors in an age of advanced capitalism and digital reproducibility.

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DEDICATION

For my grandmother, Russell.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Walter Benjamin

- GS 1 Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* 1, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991)
- GS 2 Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* 2, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991)
- GS 3 Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* 3, ed. by Hella Tiedemann-Bartels (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991)
- GS 4 Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* 4, ed. by Tillman Rexroth (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991)
- GS 5 Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* 5, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991)
- GS 6 Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* 6, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991)
- GS 7 Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* 7, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, with Christoph Gódde, Henri Lonitz and Gary Smith (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991)

Siegfried Kracauer

- KSF 6.1-6.3 Siegfried Kracauer, *Kleine Schriften zum Film* 6.1 (1921-1927), 6.2 (1928-1931), and 6.3 (1932-1961), ed. by Inka Múlder-Bach (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004)

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Es ist an der Zeit, mit dieser Produktion abzurechnen. Sie ist dumm, verlogen und nicht selten gemein. Sie dürfte so nicht fortgesetzt werden.¹

Siegfried Kracauer, 1928

German film is in rare form – it is *engaged*.²

Jaimey Fisher and Brad Prager, 2010

This thesis reads selected post-Wende German-language films through the lens of a strand of twentieth-century German film theory that claims that viewers should not be encouraged to ‘consume’ films, but that, rather, films must seek to awaken the critical faculties of viewers. It has its origins in Brecht’s ‘Epic Theatre’ and the neo-Marxist aesthetic theory of the German-Jewish intellectuals working at and with the *Frankfurter Institut für Sozialforschung* during the 1920s and 1930s. I show how programmatic texts on the subject of film (specifically on the relationship between director, film and spectator) by Walter Benjamin (1882-1940), Siegfried

¹ Siegfried Kracauer, ‘Der heutige Film und sein Publikum [Film 1928]’ (1928), in KSF 6.2, pp. 151–166.

² Jaimey Fisher and Brad Prager, ‘Introduction’, in *The Collapse of the Conventional: German Film and Its Politics at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Jaimey Fisher and Brad Prager (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2010), pp 1–39 (p. 2). Emphasis in original.

Kracauer (1889-1966) and Alexander Kluge (1932–) have continuing relevance by using them as a theoretical framework to analyse key phenomena in films by contemporary German-speaking directors. The objective of the thesis is thus twofold: first, I argue for the continuing pertinence of the writings of three theorists – Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge – who believe in the transformative potential of film as a medium; and second, through the lens of Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge, I offer an in-depth interpretation of the political in contemporary German and Austrian cinema.

THE ‘POLITICAL’ IN GERMAN FILM SCHOLARSHIP

A common point of departure for post-2000 discussions of the political in German cinema is an article by prominent chronicler of recent German film history, Eric Rentschler. In ‘From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus’, Rentschler charts the economic, political and cultural path of national cinema from the New German Cinema of the 1960s and 1970s to the so-called German ‘cinema of consensus’ that followed in the 1990s and continues to be the dominant mode of film(making), he claims, from his standpoint in 2000.³ In his narrative, West Germany has been transformed from the home of an internationally-acclaimed, politically-oriented *Autorenkino* that was formally innovative and which ‘challenged the nation’s willingness to forget the past’⁴ (embodied by Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Werner Herzog, Alexander Kluge, Wim Wenders and others) to the proud owner of a German star-driven, commercially-oriented studio film culture that skirts ‘thematics like right-wing radicalism, chronic unemployment, or the uneasy integration of the former GDR into the Federal Republic’.⁵ The new German ‘cinema of consensus’ sought to ‘engross and

³ Eric Rentschler, ‘From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus’, in *Cinema and Nation*, ed. by Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 260–277.

⁴ Ibid., p. 271.

⁵ Ibid., p. 262.

accommodate'. His assessment is damning, for the status quo is, he claims, reflective of a new sensibility that is, like the films, 'vapid and anaemic, devoid of substance, conviction and deeper meaning'.⁶

One reason that Rentschler's essay is often used as a springboard for current discussions about a 'new era' of German film is his conclusion. At the tail end of his bleak assessment of the current state of affairs, Rentschler, with a flicker of hope, points forward to some 'marginal perspectives' – directors who, he believes, exhibit 'the incendiary potential of New German Cinema'.⁷ These include three auteurs who will go on to be hugely influential: Tom Tykwer, who has been very successful at home and abroad with his oeuvre, which sits between arthouse and commercial spheres; Fatih Akin, whose film *Gegen die Wand* (2004) was the first German entry to win the Golden Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival in 18 years, and who has challenged equations of Germanness with whiteness in popular culture; and Thomas Arslan, one of the directors associated with the birth of the so-called *Berliner Schule* (to which I return below). The dominance of these three directors – and the various 'modes' of filmmaking with which they have come to be associated – implies, then, that post-millennial film has much more to offer than the cinema of consensus of the 1980s and 1990s. In other words, Rentschler's overwhelmingly negative assessment of German domestic output at the end of the twentieth century has given film theorists and critics the language and reference points to create a narrative that describes how the post-cinema of consensus is becoming political once again.

In more recent discussions of cinema and consensus, Rentschler's dichotomous perspective is widely accepted as being no longer applicable. Notably, it seems Rentschler himself is one of few voices that continues to offer a polarised description of the landscape of German film. In a book chapter he wrote twelve years after his seminal 'Cinema of Consensus'

⁶ Rentschler, 'From New German Cinema', p. 262.

⁷ Ibid., p. 275.

essay, he constructs a dialectical relationship between a cinema of consensus that persists in the form of ‘popular retro films’ – historical dramas such as Oliver Hirschbiegel’s *Der Untergang* (2004) and Marc Rothemund’s *Sophie Scholl: Die letzten Tage* (2005) – and the films of the *Berliner Schule*.⁸ For Rentschler, these two groups are opposed in form and content: ‘one revisits the past, the other reflects on and reconnoiters the topographies of the present’.⁹ According to most accounts, however, post-Wall German cinema does not lend itself to clear-cut distinctions. Instead, it offers a rich variety of responses to the history and politics of the Berlin Republic that is more diverse, more willing to engage directly with German history, and more formally experimental than the majority of the domestic output in the 1990s. The different film genres and formal approaches do not necessarily stand in opposition to one another, but instead represent, in the words of Fisher and Prager, ‘adjacent peaks on the same topographical surface, contiguous but distinct’.¹⁰ Strict divisions between art house and commercial tendencies are disrupted by figures like Tom Tykwer and Wolfgang Becker, whose internationally successful films are produced by X-Filme Creative Pool, a collective that has been compared to the *Filmverlag der Autoren* of the 1970s.¹¹ In keeping with a wider trend towards exploring popular cinema as a site of subversion and resistance, David Clarke argues against the affirmative/dissenting binary in his edited volume that offers new readings of

⁸ Eric Rentschler, ‘The Lives of Others: The History of Heritage and the Rhetoric of Consensus’ in *“The Lives of Others” and Contemporary German Film: A Companion*, ed. by Paul Cooke (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), pp. 241–260 (p. 242).

⁹ Rentschler, ‘The Lives of Others’, p. 242.

¹⁰ Fisher and Prager (eds), p. 11.

¹¹ David Clarke, ‘Introduction’, in *German Cinema Since Unification*, ed. by David Clarke (London: Continuum, 2006), pp. 1–10 (p. 4), and Fisher and Prager (eds), p. 12. Bergfelder, Carter and Göktürk argue for a more inclusive German film history in *The German Cinema Book*, ed. by Tim Bergfelder, Erica Carter and Deniz Göktürk (London: BFI, 2002), and include two substantial sections on ‘Popular Cinema’ (pp. 13–56) and ‘Stars’ (pp. 57–106).

supposedly affirmative films of the 1990s and the 2000s.¹² Furthermore, Rentschler's distinction between Munich's *Hochschule für Fernsehen und Film* (HFF) as home to the 'Produzentenfilm' and the *Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin* (dfab) as a more politically-oriented film school is no longer tenable either, given that two makers of films that are decidedly not *Produzentenfilme*, Christoph Hochhäusler and Benjamin Heisenberg, spent their formative years in Munich.¹³ As Cooke and Homewood point out, graduates of film schools all over Germany and Austria are contributing to the success of the 'nouvelle vague allemande'.¹⁴

Even the scepticism towards the 'consensual' nature of the historical 'heritage' film expressed by Rentschler – which was a pervasive scholarly trope in the 2000s¹⁵ – is being challenged. For example, Elizabeth O'Brien argues that the genre of the history film offers critical insights into the German present, tapping into discourse that is common in literature and memory studies.¹⁶ Further, Paul Cooke suggests that the emotional response prompted in 'affirmative' films such as *Der Untergang*, *Sophie Scholl*, and Max Färberböck's *Aimée & Jaguar* (1999) 'might well lead to a new process of reflection' that moves beyond the 'self-destructive loop of melancholic repetition' that Elsaesser identifies in New German Cinema.¹⁷ In casting these films in a different light, Cooke broadens the scope of interpretations of the political in

¹² Clarke, 'Introduction', p. 4. In Clarke's volume see e.g. Dickon Copsey, 'The New German Comedy and the Failed Romance', pp. 181–206. I also challenge the affirmative function of the screwball comedy in Leila Mukhida, 'Against the Pull of Convention: Subversive Laughter in Angelina Maccarone's *Alles wird gut*', *German Life and Letters*, 65 (2012), 489–502.

¹³ Fisher and Prager (eds), p. 11.

¹⁴ Paul Cooke and Chris Homewood, 'Introduction', in *New Directions in German Cinema*, ed. by Paul Cooke and Chris Homewood (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), pp. 1–19 (pp. 6–7).

¹⁵ For arguments pertaining to the 'consensual' nature of the heritage film see Rentschler, 'The Lives of Others', p. 242, Sabine Hake, *German National Cinema*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 215, and Roger F. Cook, Lutz Koepnick, Kristin Kopp and Brad Prager, 'Introduction', in *Berlin School Glossary: An ABC of the New Wave in German Cinema* (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), pp. 1–25 (pp. 16–17).

¹⁶ Elizabeth O'Brien, *Post-Wall German Cinema and National History: Utopianism and Dissent* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2012).

¹⁷ Cooke and Homewood (eds), p. 11. Cooke and Homewood refer to Thomas Elsaesser, 'New German Cinema and History: the Case of Alexander Kluge', in Bergfelder, Carter and Göktürk (eds), pp. 182–191.

relation to – and distinct from – the New German Cinema.

Nevertheless, what has remained from Rentschler's influential 'Cinema of Consensus' article is a dominant understanding of the political in German film, whereby a film's politics is measured against the aesthetic choices, critical content, and production structures of the New German Cinema. It is an interpretation that takes as its starting point the signing of the Oberhausen Manifesto in February 1962, a document released by a group of young filmmakers who were dissatisfied with the conditions of the German film industry in the late nineteen-fifties. Alexander Kluge, filmmaker, theorist and key figure in this thesis, was one of the leading signatories to denounce the filmmaking practices of his time ('Der alte Film ist tot'¹⁸). The primary objective of the group was change on every level, from the subject areas to be addressed ('der Film muß sich mit sozialer Dokumentation, mit politischen Fragen, mit Bildungsfragen [...] befassen können'¹⁹) all the way to a complete restructuring of film production and funding that would allow for non-commercial, ideologically independent filmmaking practices.

In the spring of 1962, three goals were defined in order to further their objective: first, to aid a new generation of filmmakers through the creation of a non-commercial foundation for young German film; second, to subsidise independent short films, 'das natürliche Experimentierfeld des Films'; and third, to establish an intellectual academy for film in Ulm, at which theory would be taught alongside practical skills.²⁰ The legacy of the manifesto is far-reaching, and includes the founding of the *Kuratorium junger deutscher Film* in 1965, which continues to support young talent today, and the opening of the *Institut für Filmgestaltung* in Ulm

¹⁸ Alexander Kluge, 'Was wollen die "Oberhausener"?' in *Der alte Film war tot: 100 Texte zum westdeutschen Film 1962-1987*, ed. by Hans Helmut Prinzler and Eric Rentschler (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Autoren, 2001).

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 47.

²⁰ Eric Rentschler, *West German Film in the Course of Time* (New York: Redgrave, 1984), p. 38.

in 1963, which closed in 1968. Its most celebrated legacy is the oeuvre of the New German Cinema, which won international recognition for its forceful break from its predecessors.

Scholars' efforts to re-inscribe the political into the narrative of German cinema over the past 15 years – often through creating links between the New German Cinema and the activities of filmmakers today – are illustrative of recurrent waves of optimism relating to the wider social function that film might serve. In this study, I am interested in exploring a particular trajectory of such film-theoretical optimism, and asking how contemporary filmmakers may be seen as responding to this. Whilst the Oberhausen Manifesto represents a key marker on this trajectory, it is not the beginning. The optimism to which I refer might also be described as a leftist political perspective that is closely linked to the critical theory that emerged from the 'Frankfurt School': the group of Marxist, German-Jewish intellectuals based at the *Frankfurter Institut für Sozialforschung*, founded in 1923.

The Institute included figures such as Theodor W. Adorno, Leo Lowenthal, Gershom Sholem, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Herbert Marcuse, and Max Horkheimer, who became Director and Editor of the Institute's journal, the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, in 1930. Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer, on whom this thesis focuses, moved within the 'intellectual orbit'²¹ of the Frankfurt School, and were closely acquainted with its members, yet professionally independent, for the most part. The Institute went into exile in the United States in 1934, where its affiliates continued their assault on capitalist ideology, extending Marx's critique of capitalism into the cultural sphere.²² The group was not uniform in thought, and this is especially evident in the texts on the subject of film. In their seminal text, *Dialektik der*

²¹ This term is used by Gerd Gemünden and Johannes von Moltke to describe Benjamin and Kracauer's affiliations with the *Institut für Sozialforschung* in 'Introduction: Kracauer's Legacies', in *Culture in the Anteroom: The Legacies of Siegfried Kracauer*, ed. by Gerd Gemünden and Johannes von Moltke (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), pp. 1–25 (p. 6).

²² For a comprehensive account of the Frankfurt School thinkers, see Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research 1923-1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

Aufklärung (1944), Adorno and Horkheimer eschew film as a site of political potential, as they consider it a form of entertainment firmly embedded in the culture industry. Their disillusionment in this text is perhaps an inevitable response to the rise of fascism and the genocide of six million Jews across Europe. Yet a concurrent strand of film-theoretical optimism emerged from this group in the writings of Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer, both of whom champion film as the medium best suited to serve the neo-Marxist critical imperative of emancipation and enlightenment in the mass public.

The framework through which I explore the political in German and Austrian film in this thesis is based on these moments of optimism and possibility. Rather than taking the Oberhausen Manifesto as a point of departure in this study, my theoretical trajectory takes Weimar film theory into account, too. The body of theory is comprised of programmatic texts on film written by Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Alexander Kluge. I show the points of intersection and divergence in their writing, relating to their shared disenchantment with the domestic output of the German film industry in the eras in which they are writing, and the hope they place in a different, as yet unrealised, politically engaged cinema. The empirical corpus of the thesis is made up of eight contemporary films by seven German-speaking directors. By reading post-Wende cultural texts through the lens of these neo-Marxist theories, I aim to test whether the call to arms issued by Kracauer, Benjamin and Kluge at different points in the twentieth century is now redundant. To what extent do their observations relating to the alienated condition of the modern subject in an age of technological modernity and capitalism retain their currency in an age of advanced capitalism and digital technology? Are there directors who may be seen as responding to the thinkers' call to arms? If so, what conclusions can we draw about political filmmaking in the landscape of contemporary German-language cinema?

OVERVIEW OF THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The pairing of Walter Benjamin with Siegfried Kracauer is not an unlikely one. Textual crossovers between the two figures have been the focus of scholarship, in broader terms as well as in relation to cinema specifically.²³ Though Alexander Kluge was born half a century and one world war later than Benjamin and Kracauer, his friendship with Adorno set him on an intellectual and creative trajectory that makes it possible to identify a continuum in the three thinkers' philosophies. In different ways and to varying degrees, Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge investigate the role of art in society, expressly the relationship between cultural producer, cultural object and audience. They each write from a position of dissatisfaction concerning the state of the film industry at their respective points of writing; Kracauer's statement in the epigraph that contemporary productions are 'dumm' and 'verlogen' reflects the sentiments of Benjamin and Kluge, too. All three thinkers consider the way that this relationship changes over time as indicative of wider transformations in society: not only of the role of art, but the economics and politics of the cultural production, the public sphere in its broadest sense, and, perhaps most significantly, changes in human perception as a result of technological modernity. Crucially, each identifies the moving image as the medium best suited to negotiate these changes in different ways. My aim in this thesis is not to create a smooth continuum of thought, but rather to show how these three thinkers can shed light on instances of political optimism in contemporary German-language film.

²³ The most extensive study on Benjamin, Kracauer and cinema is Miriam Bratu Hansen, *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012). On Benjamin, Kracauer, film and urban modernity see also Graeme Gilloch, 'Urban Optics: Film, Phantasmagoria and the City in Benjamin and Kracauer', *new formations*, 61 (2007), 115–131. On photography-related intersections see Steve Giles, 'Making Visible, Making Strange: Photography and Representation in Kracauer, Brecht and Benjamin', *new formations*, 61 (2007), 64–75. For an examination of commonalities in the thinkers' respective approaches to media and politics, together with Alexander Kluge, see Tara Forrest, *The Politics of Imagination: Benjamin, Kracauer, Kluge* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2007). Notably, this is the only monograph that looks at the three thinkers together.

I draw upon texts by Benjamin, Kracauer, and Kluge spanning six decades. I look at criticism on specific films, writings about film industries and how they operate in wider contexts, and programmatic essays and monographs on cinema. The primary sources by Kracauer to which I refer are taken from different points in his career, pre- and post-World War Two. Born on 8 February 1889 in Frankfurt am Main to a middle-class German-Jewish family, Kracauer first studied architecture and gained a doctorate in engineering, a profession that he pursued throughout the war and then gave up in 1921 to join the *Frankfurter Zeitung* as a cultural correspondent, and acting as Culture Editor from 1924 onwards.²⁴ Between this point and his forced exile to France in 1933, he published almost 2,000 articles for the paper, around a third of which were film reviews.²⁵ I cite a number of these texts written during the Weimar Republic, a period in which he forged and maintained friendships with Leo Löwenthal, Theodor W. Adorno, whom he mentored during the latter's late teens, Ernst Bloch, and Walter Benjamin, whom he first met and began corresponding with in 1924.²⁶ Martin Jay characterises the group as 'unaffiliated and experimental leftists who [...] were fascinated by cultural questions more than economic ones'.²⁷ Kracauer was the least dogmatic in his politics and often had to defend his moderate, at times critical, stance towards the Marxist idealism embraced by Lukács, for example.²⁸ Jay cites correspondence between

²⁴ For comprehensive biographical information see Martin Jay, 'The Extraterritorial Life of Siegfried Kracauer', *Salmagundi*, 31/32 (1975/76), 49–106.

²⁵ A complete listing of Kracauer's writings can be found in Thomas Y. Levin, *Siegfried Kracauer: Eine Bibliographie seiner Schriften* (Marbach am Neckar: Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 1989). The posthumous publication of Kracauer's complete works in to edited volumes includes the three-volume collection of his film-related essays and reviews: Siegfried Kracauer, *Kleine Schriften zum Film*, *Band 6.1* (1921-1927), *Band 6.2* (1928-1931), and *Band 6.3* (1932-1961), ed. by Inka Mülder-Bach (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004).

²⁶ The first record of written correspondence between the two is a letter from Benjamin to Kracauer dated 1st March 1924, and the last is also a letter from Benjamin, on 14th May 1940, four and a half months before his death. See Walter Benjamin, *Briefe an Siegfried Kracauer*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Marbach am Neckar: Theodor W. Adorno Archiv, 1987).

²⁷ Jay, 'The Extraterritorial Life of Siegfried Kracauer', p. 61.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 63–64.

Kracauer and Ernst Bloch to show how Kracauer positions himself as a dissenting voice from within the ‘staunchly bourgeois’ *Frankfurter Zeitung*:

[with regards to his] writing for the *FZ*, he remarked that his reputation as an ‘enemy of the bourgeoisie’ was known to all and that writing in a non-Marxist paper gave his words greater public impact. The accusation [by Bloch] that he had repudiated his militancy was also nonsense: ‘I have advocated Marxism visibly enough and more than others and will continue to advocate it in a way that corresponds to my talents and energies’.²⁹

Kracauer’s focus on the cinema and other cultural phenomena in the tens of hundreds of texts he wrote for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* are part of his project of mapping – and understanding – ‘the experience of modernity as living on the brink of catastrophe’, as Hansen writes:³⁰

Kracauer sees the historical process which culminates in modernity as an increased withdrawal of meaning from life, a dissociation of truth and existence; the world is disintegrating into a chaotic multiplicity of phenomena. This process is synonymous, in the economic and social realm, with capitalist rationalization and the concomitant alienation of human life, labor, and interpersonal relations.³¹

The project entails rendering visible and analysing where the changes brought about by modernity are perceptible. Film offers a treasure trove of ‘unscheinbaren Oberflächenäußerungen’, as Kracauer writes in his now-famous introduction to ‘Das Ornament der Masse’.³² Concerns regarding ‘the alienation of human life’ is a key theoretical

²⁹ Jay, ‘The Extraterritorial Life of Siegfried Kracauer’, p. 64. Jay cites a letter from Kracauer to Bloch dated May 29, 1932.

³⁰ Miriam Hansen, ‘Introduction’, in Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. vii–xlv (p. xi).

³¹ Miriam Hansen, ‘Decentric Perspectives: Kracauer’s Early Writings on Film and Mass Culture’, in *New German Critique*, 54 (1991), 47–76 (p. 50).

³² Siegfried Kracauer, ‘Das Ornament der Masse’, in *Das Ornament der Masse* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1963), pp. 50–63 (p. 50).

trope that Kracauer and Benjamin have in common with Kluge, despite the different eras in which they write.

Indeed, film becomes not only an indicator of the alienated subject, but also the medium of redemption in the second monograph published during Kracauer's exile in the United States, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, which appeared in 1960.³³ I draw extensively on this book, in particular in my discussions of realism in contemporary German-language cinema. His first post-War monograph from 1947, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* was the culmination of a project that was initially suggested to Kracauer by Max Horkheimer.³⁴ Here, Kracauer addresses the topic of fascism head-on. By searching for 'clues to hidden mental processes' in German silent film and Weimar expressionist cinema, Kracauer attempts to uncover a secret history – creating a linear, fascist trajectory – that foretells the fate of the German nation.³⁵ In *Theory of Film*, however, fascism plays a more spectral role. Kracauer continues his project of making sense of the present through film; the present, however, has been blown apart by the catastrophe to which Hansen refers above, and thus, whilst the Holocaust is mentioned only a few times, 'the elided historical object of the book is [...] the question of film after Auschwitz'.³⁶ In a move that may appear surprising given the ideological undercurrents he identifies in *From Caligari to Hitler*, Kracauer turns to the cinema for salvation. He ascribes to film the capacity to re-establish the connection between mankind and 'material reality' that has been lost:

It is my contention that film, our contemporary, has a definite bearing on the era into which it is born; that it meets our inmost needs precisely by exposing – for the

³³ Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

³⁴ Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of German Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004)

³⁵ Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, p. 7.

³⁶ Hansen summarises the now familiar argument that the Holocaust is the epistemological vanishing point of *Theory of Film* put forward by Gertrud Koch and Heide Schlüpmann in 'Introduction', p. xiv.

first time, as it were – outer reality and thus deepening, in Gabriel Marcel’s words, our relation to ‘this Earth which is our habitat’.³⁷

The body of the text is a treatise on cinematic realism, while the Epilogue delivers a critique of ‘modern man’s intellectual landscape’, characterised by alienation, isolation and ideological disunity.³⁸ Whereas the experiences of the cinema-going masses in the mid-1950s are different to those of pre-war Germans, Kracauer believes that the films continue to be consumed in a state of distraction, and that the cinema remains a means of escapism. He argues that technological progress has created a disjuncture between the spectator-subject and ‘physical reality’; the condition of modern man is such that his ability to *experience* is lacking. Finally, Kracauer gestures towards the potential of film to bridge this gap and to enable viewers to experience ‘the world that is ours’.³⁹

In the *New German Critique* special edition on Siegfried Kracauer from 1991 – a landmark publication in Anglo-American Kracauer scholarship⁴⁰ – Patrice Petro explains how scholars (notably Thomas Elsaesser, Gertrud Koch, and Heide Schlüpmann) tend to imagine two distinct Kracaues, pre- and post-exile.⁴¹ They cite ‘Weimar’ Kracauer’s growing interest in Marxism and contact with the Frankfurt School thinkers in their assessment of his

³⁷ Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p. li. Kracauer quotes Gabriel Marcel, ‘Possibilités et limites de l’art cinématographique’, *Revue internationale de filmologie*, 5 (1954), 163–176.

³⁸ Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p. 287.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 296–304.

⁴⁰ In the year of the centenary of Kracauer’s birth, 1989, the *Akademie der Diözese Rottenburg-Stuttgart* and *Fachstelle für Medienarbeit* joint-hosted the conference Internationale interdisziplinäre Symposions Siegfried Kracauer, which ran from 2–4 March in Weingarten, and was organised by Michael Kessler. In the introduction to the resulting conference publication, *Siegfried Kracauer: Neue Interpretationen* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1990), editors Michael Kessler and Thomas Y. Levin note that up until 1989, there were only two major accessible publications on the works of Kracauer: an issue of *Text und Kritik*, ed. by Heinz Ludwig Arnold, 68 (1980), and Inka Mülder, *Siegfried Kracauer – Grenzgänger zwischen Theorie und Literatur: Seine frühen Schriften 1913–1933* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1985). The *New German Critique* special issue on Siegfried Kracauer, 54 (1991), in which Petro’s article appears, was the first English-language collection of criticism.

⁴¹ Patrice Petro, ‘Kracauer’s Epistemological Shift’, *New German Critique*, 54 (1991), 127–138 (pp. 131–132).

Ideologiekritik. Based on his reviews for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, the first Kracauer is characterised as an ‘anticapitalist practitioner of a “material dialectics” (if not a dialectical materialism), the phenomenological observer of the local, the ephemeral, the everyday’.⁴² Against the ‘American’ Kracauer, charges of conformity and conservatism are levelled, based on *From Caligari to Hitler* and *Theory of Film*. This second Kracauer is considered an ‘anticommunist émigré intellectual, the sociological critic turned melancholy realist’.⁴³ Arguing against this narrative, Petro encourages the reading of Kracauer’s diverse German and American texts as part of a ‘common project’, claiming that Kracauer’s apparent political turnaround must be considered in light of the dramatic changes he experienced in his everyday life as a result of fleeing fascist Europe. Petro also draws attention to other factors that must be taken into account: changes in Kracauer’s readership in the USA; a ‘very different sense of place and belonging’; and the changing role of film in society and the establishment of film studies as a discipline.⁴⁴ Petro’s article paved the way for methods of understanding and commenting on Kracauer’s oeuvre that highlight points of continuity alongside rupture.

Miriam Hansen has been a key figure in the ‘re-wiring of the conception of Kracauer’.⁴⁵ Hansen meticulously traced the history of the writing of *Theory of Film* back to its conception in November 1940, when Kracauer was in exile in Marseille. By engaging with unpublished material – three large pads containing notes for a book on ‘film aesthetics’ inherited by the *Deutsches Literaturarchiv* – Hansen shows how preliminary sketches of the monograph reveal much in common with Kracauer’s Marxist ideological-critical writings for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*.⁴⁶ She also claims a stronger influence of Benjamin on the text, given that the two thinkers were in close contact during their time in Marseille. Like Petro, she calls for

⁴² Petro, p. 131.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 135.

⁴⁵ Gemünden and von Moltke (eds), p. 10.

⁴⁶ Miriam Hansen, “‘With Skin and Hair’: Kracauer’s *Theory of Film*, Marseille 1940’, *Critical Inquiry*, 19 (1993), 437–469.

an approach to Kracauer's work that is in many ways *redemptive*; one that is more forgiving of his seeming utopianism and which emphasises a synthesis in the thinker's necessarily quite different perspectives. This project is taken up by Gerd Gemünden and Johannes von Moltke in their recent collection of Anglo-American scholarship on Kracauer, *Culture in the Anteroom: The Legacies of Siegfried Kracauer*,⁴⁷ and I would consider this thesis as part of a similar trajectory. Whilst acknowledging the historical specificity of Kracauer's writings at different points of the twentieth century, I am also interested in reading contemporary film through the lens (singular) of Kracauer's multi-dimensional theory.

Walter Benjamin was well acquainted with Kracauer, as is clear from their correspondence as well as from the instances of theoretical overlap and references to one another's work.⁴⁸ Three years younger than Kracauer, Benjamin was born on 15 July 1892 in Berlin to a well-off German-Jewish family.⁴⁹ After leaving his hometown to study philosophy in Freiburg, Bern and Munich, he returned to Berlin in 1920 with aspirations to work in academia, having completed his doctorate and with a number of unpublished essays to his name. He nevertheless failed to launch an academic career; the work he submitted for his application for a *Habilitation* at the Goethe University Frankfurt, a polemical study of Goethe entitled *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, had the effect of alienating Benjamin from influential members of the academy such as the intellectual group surrounding Stefan George, of which he was striving to be part. Those on whom Benjamin did make an impression, however,

⁴⁷ Gerd Gemünden and Johannes von Moltke (eds), *Culture in the Anteroom: The Legacies of Siegfried Kracauer* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012).

⁴⁸ See footnote 23 of this chapter for scholarship on points of intersection between the two thinkers. Though it is mainly the letters and postcards from Benjamin to Kracauer which have survived and made it to print, contact was maintained and the relationship valued by both sides; the formal address 'Lieber Herr Kracauer' turns to 'Lieber Kracauer' and eventually 'Cher Ami' in the final letter that Benjamin writes to Kracauer from Paris in 1940 (in French). Kracauer and Benjamin were both in Marseille from mid-August to shortly before Benjamin's death.

⁴⁹ For detailed bibliographical information, refer to Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014). This is the most substantial critical work to date that takes Benjamin's entire oeuvre into account, and does so chronologically. See also Esther Leslie, *Walter Benjamin* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007).

remained good friends and important allies, and facilitated his integration into – and financial support from – the *Frankfurter Institut für Sozialforschung*, including Adorno, Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Gershom Scholem. His integration into the group, however, had its limitations. In her account of his life in the introduction to *Illuminations*, Hannah Arendt writes that ‘Benjamin probably was the most peculiar Marxist ever produced by this movement, which God knows had its full share of oddities’.⁵⁰ He was interested in a more practical, crude kind of dialectical thinking than many of his colleagues, one that could be found in the work of poets and novelists rather than philosophers, and in the conversion of theory into practice.⁵¹

Bertolt Brecht offered Benjamin a model in this respect. Benjamin identified strongly with the poet and playwright: ‘mein Einverständnis mit der Produktion von Brecht [stellt] einen der wichtigsten, und bewehrtesten, Punkte meiner gesamten Position [dar] [...]. Ich habe ihn literarisch, wenn auch niemals umfassend so doch öfter annähernd umschreiben können’.⁵² They had a close friendship, and Stanley Mitchell claims that ‘[t]here are, for instance, strong indications that the ideas and implications of “epic theatre” were common to them both before they met’.⁵³ Given that Brecht’s theatrical practice directly influenced Benjamin’s writings on the role of the intellectual and the socio-political function of art, the forms that art may take, I also draw upon Benjamin’s *Versuche über Brecht* in this thesis.

The focus on the ‘materialist’ facet of dialectical materialism is an element of Benjamin’s thought that links him to Kracauer: whilst both were Marxist in orientation,

⁵⁰ Hannah Arendt, ‘Introduction. Walter Benjamin: 1892-1940’, in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. and intr. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969) pp. 1–51 (p. 11).

⁵¹ Arendt cites Brecht’s concept of ‘das plumpe Denken’ (translated as ‘crude’) and refers to Benjamin’s praise of ‘plumpe Gedanken’ with regards to Brecht’s *Dreigroschenroman*. Arendt, p. 15. Arendt cites Walter Benjamin, ‘Brecht’s Dreigroschenroman’ (1935), in *GS* 3, pp. 440–449 (p. 446).

⁵² Walter Benjamin, ‘Letter to Kitty Marx-Steinschneider dated 20 October 1933’, in Walter Benjamin, *Briefe* 2, ed. by Gershom Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966), pp. 594–596 (p. 594).

⁵³ Stanley Mitchell, ‘Introduction’, in Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, ed. by Stanley Mitchell, trans. by Anna Bostock (London: Suhrkamp, 1966), pp. vii–xix (p. viii).

Marxism remains ‘a heuristic-methodological stimulus’ in Arendt’s words.⁵⁴ Whilst Marxist doctrine offered a broad framework through which modernity could be theorised, both thinkers also place emphasis on its smaller-scale, material manifestations. Arendt writes about Benjamin:

He was concerned with the correlation between a street scene, a speculation on the stock exchange, a poem, a thought, with the hidden line which holds them together and enables the historian or philologist to recognize that they must all be placed in the same period.⁵⁵

For the most part, Benjamin’s gaze was not on the moving image as Kracauer’s was. Nevertheless, both offer a critique of the subject that is very clearly bound up with, as Hansen writes above, ‘the experience of modernity as living on the brink of catastrophe’. And, most importantly in the context of this thesis, both consider film a suitable medium through which to theorise this experience.

During the time when Kracauer was Cultural Editor of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, Benjamin also wrote for the paper on a freelance basis, though his contributions were primarily literary reviews. The diaries he wrote during his time in Moscow at the end of 1926 reveal him to be an admirer of certain Russian films,⁵⁶ and he wrote two essays on the Russian films he had seen for the *Literarische Welt* in 1927, to which I refer in Chapter 2.⁵⁷ He wrote short essays about Charlie Chaplin, of whom he was a great fan, as well as on Mickey Mouse,⁵⁸ yet film is more often an incidental topic in discussions about political modes of production,

⁵⁴ Arendt, p. 11.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Benjamin praises Kuleshov’s technical expertise after he sees *By The Law* (1926) during his time in Moscow, but highlights the shortcomings of the story, which he regards as descending into the absurd. See Walter Benjamin, ‘Moskauer Tagebuch’ (1926/27), in *GS* 6, pp. 292–409 (pp. 309–310).

⁵⁷ Walter Benjamin, ‘Zur Lage der russischen Filmkunst’ (1927), in *GS* 2, pp. 474–751, and ‘Erwiderung an Oscar A.H. Schmitz’ (1927), in *GS* 2, pp. 751–755.

⁵⁸ Walter Benjamin, ‘Rückblick auf Chaplin’ (1929), in *GS* 3, pp. 157–159, and Walter Benjamin, ‘Zu Micky Maus’ (1931), in *GS* 6, pp. 144–145. For an insightful analysis of Benjamin’s theory of film in relation to Disney, see Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, pp. 163–182.

photography, kitsch and fantasy. Despite Benjamin's texts on film constituting only a fraction of his body of works, his lasting impression on film criticism is no less significant than Kracauer's due largely to his 1936 essay on technology and its effect on the artwork, 'Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit' (hereafter 'the *Kunstwerk* essay'), which I refer to in detail throughout this thesis.⁵⁹

The *Kunstwerk* essay has a complex history that demands some attention before engaging with the text itself. Before he allowed the first publication of the *Kunstwerk* in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* in 1936 – in French – Horkheimer insisted on numerous, substantial changes to the original typewritten German version that Benjamin first submitted to the *Zeitschrift*. Consequently, the only version that was published during his lifetime represented a compromise for the writer, since some key theoretical ideas – most notably, the now-familiar opening section on Marx – are omitted. The confusingly-named 'second version' from 1936, which Benjamin originally submitted to Horkheimer in German, before its translation into French, was assumed lost until it was uncovered amongst the material in the *Max-Horkheimer-Archiv* in the *Frankfurter Stadt- und Universitätsbibliothek*, and subsequently published in the *Gesammelte Schriften* in 1989. Benjamin refers to this as the 'Urtext'.⁶⁰ The first German version to appear in print, however, was what is now referred to as the 'third version' (though referred to in the first editions of the *Gesammelte Schriften* as the 'zweite Fassung'), which Benjamin worked on for several years after its publication in French with the intention of submitting it to a German-language journal.⁶¹ He was unsuccessful, however, and this version was first published posthumously by Theodor and Gretel Adorno.⁶² It is this third version, completed in 1939, which is most commonly cited, in large part due to its inclusion in *Illuminations*, the

⁵⁹ Walter Benjamin, 'L'œuvre d'art à l'époque de sa reproduction mécanisée', trans. by Pierre Klossowski, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 5.1 (1936), pp. 40–66, and in *GS* 1, pp. 709–739.

⁶⁰ Benjamin, *GS* 1, p. 991.

⁶¹ Benjamin, *GS* 1, pp. 471–508.

⁶² Walter Benjamin, *Schriften*, ed. by Theodor W. Adorno and Gretel Adorno (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1955), pp. 366–404.

English-language collection of Benjamin's essays edited by, and with an introduction by Hannah Arendt, from 1969.⁶³ This is the version to which I refer in this thesis, unless otherwise stated.⁶⁴

At the risk of simplifying the dense text, the essay comprises fifteen short 'theses' into which two primary threads of argument are woven. Benjamin's first argument is that subjective experience has been transformed since the birth of mass culture in nineteenth-century Paris. He explains this transformation using the relationship between subject and artwork as an analogy: before the artwork was technologically reproducible, it was characterised by uniqueness, authority (a determinable author/creator), and ritual value (value ascribed according to history and tradition), which together gave the artwork its 'aura'. In an age of technological modernity, however, this kind of artwork is no longer befitting of the modern urban dweller, whose consciousness has necessarily adapted to cope with the 'shocks' that he or she encounters every day on account of industrialisation and urbanisation. The protective shield that he or she develops as a result of this has an alienating function, according to Benjamin, and results in a populace that is susceptible to manipulation to fascist ends. Further, in different ways to Kracauer, Benjamin also invests in *film* the capacity to undo the

⁶³ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in *Illuminations*, ed. and intr. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), pp. 219–253. (A re-worked, improved translation by Harry Zohn and Edmund Jephcott is published in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings* 4, ed. by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. by Edmund Jephcott et al. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003) pp. 251–283).

⁶⁴ See the respective editorial notes in *Gesammelte Schriften* for information relating to the different versions: see *GS* 1, pp. 982–1063 for the editors' comments on the first German handwritten version, the third version (referred to as the 'second version' here), and the French version; see *GS* 7, pp. 661–690 for the editors' comments on the second version which Benjamin originally submitted to Horkheimer for publication, and see *GS* 7, pp. 681–682 for a clear overview of the structural differences between the four different versions. The original version that was submitted to Horkheimer is published in *GS* 7, pp. 350–384. For a brief history of its reception, see Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, p. 38 and p. 307, footnote 28. See also Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, 'Chronology 1935–1938', in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings* 3, ed. by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. by Edmund Jephcott, Howard Eiland, et al., (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 417–448 (pp. 426–429).

alienation and distraction of the viewing masses, which constitutes the second principal theoretical strand of the essay. Here, the ‘antinomic structure of Benjamin’s thinking’ is revealed.⁶⁵ the cinema is at once where the collective national psyche is (currently, negatively) shaped, as well as a site of redemption. Benjamin imagines an as-yet-unrealised alternative function for a medium that has so far failed to achieve its potential.

The controversies surrounding the essay at the time of its initial publication in May 1936 in French under the title ‘L’œuvre d’art à l’époque de sa reproduction mécanisée’ in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* under Horkheimer’s editorship are well documented. Adorno’s main objection, for example, is Benjamin’s equation of aura with ‘high art’, or *l’art pour l’art*, citing Mallarmé and Schönberg as examples of autonomous art that is not auratic.⁶⁶ Adorno further calls into question Benjamin’s embracing of film as counter-revolutionary, calling him ‘romantic’ in the faith he places in the film-going masses:

daß der Reaktionär durch Sachverständnis vom Chaplinfilm zum Avantgardisten werde – das scheint mir ebenfalls eine Romantisierung durchaus, denn weder kann ich Kracauers Liebling, auch jetzt nach Modern Times, zur Avantgarde rechnen.⁶⁷

Here, Adorno’s stance towards Benjamin (and Kracauer) is clear.⁶⁸ Yet, as Hansen points out, the rhetorical form of the artwork essay should not be underestimated: she suggests it be considered ‘a set of militant theses defined by their tactical, interventionist value rather than their validity as an empirical account, a partisan manifesto rather than a presumably neutral

⁶⁵ Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, p. 81.

⁶⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Letter to Benjamin dated 18 March 1936’, in Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *Briefwechsel 1928–1940*, ed. by Henri Lonitz (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1994), pp. 168–177 (p. 169–173).

⁶⁷ Adorno, ‘Letter to Benjamin dated 18 March 1936’, p. 172.

⁶⁸ See Richard Wolin’s section on ‘The Adorno-Benjamin Dispute’, specifically relating to the *Kunstwerk* essay, in his monograph *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 183–197.

scholarly treatise'.⁶⁹ This 'interventionist' definition defines the way I engage the artwork essay in this thesis. It represents a key moment of optimism concerning the filmic form within a set of specific historical and political parameters.

At this point it is worth noting that the 'optimism' I identify in Benjamin and Kracauer must be qualified by acknowledgment of a secular Jewish Messianic tradition that directly and indirectly informs both thinkers' work. Anson Rabinbach characterises the post-1914 messianism to which Kracauer and Benjamin subscribed as follows:

Modern Jewish Messianism [...] emphasizes a certain kind of intellectuality as politics, a spiritual radicalism which aims at nothing less than 'total transformation' of the individual and society. [...] Whether theoretical or actual, the politics of Jewish Messianism is in the final analysis apocalyptic – even when it assumes political guises.⁷⁰

Rabinbach notes that the kind of Messianism present in the writings of Benjamin, Bloch and others is not 'pure' in form, but rather should be understood as a 'spirit or attitude'.⁷¹ He describes it as an impulse that 'appears within different Jewish-secular frameworks'.⁷² The scope of this thesis is not broad enough to take the respective Jewish-secular frameworks of Benjamin and Kracauer into account, or to interrogate to what extent their writings on film represent this mode of apocalyptic thought in a 'political guise'. Nevertheless, it is necessary to emphasise that the optimism to which I refer runs, at times, concurrent to allusions to a cataclysmic rupture that is imminent (for Benjamin) or that has already happened (for the later Kracauer).⁷³

⁶⁹ Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, p. 77.

⁷⁰ Anson Rabinbach, 'Between Enlightenment and Apocalypse: Benjamin, Bloch and Modern German-Jewish Messianism', *New German Critique*, 34 (1985), 78–124 (p. 82).

⁷¹ Rabinbach, p. 83.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Alongside Rabinbach see also Wolin, pp. 48–63. Hansen sketches Kracauer's 'complex' Messianism in Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, pp. 21–24.

Texts by Alexander Kluge form the third theoretical strand of this specifically leftist, neo-Marxist filmic optimism. The absence of Messianic undertones, compounded by his practice as a filmmaker and television producer, makes Kluge's optimism somewhat easier to delineate. On the other hand, Kluge's body of experimental shorts and feature films, television productions, works of fiction, film- and social theory constitutes nothing short of a 'network' of 'symbiotic or mutually implicating arrangement of input and output',⁷⁴ in Elsaesser's terms, so that extrapolating the most relevant texts to underscore his particular strand of optimism demands some significant selectivity. The material that I draw upon from Alexander Kluge thus constitutes only a small sliver of his vast creative output over the past six decades. Born in Saxony-Anhalt on 14 February 1932, (Ernst) Alexander Kluge studied music and modern history in Marburg and Freiburg before studying law and gaining his Doctor Juris degree in 1956. It was during his time working in a legal practice in Frankfurt that he came to know Theodor W. Adorno, who introduced him to Fritz Lang, for whom he worked as an intern on the set of *Das indische Grabmal* in 1958-9. The friendship between Kluge and Adorno was mutually influential. For Kluge as for other members of the German left, Adorno's paradigm of the Culture Industry remained a key point of reference in the sixties and seventies.⁷⁵ However, Kluge eschews Adorno's (and Horkheimer's) absolute division between high and mass culture, a problem that Hansen articulates like this:

Adorno not only hypostasized the difference between critical subjectivity and the subject of mass manipulation; he also denied the empirical possibility that new forms – and other kinds – of experience, new modes of expression, self-reflection,

⁷⁴ Thomas Elsaesser, 'The Stubborn Persistence of Alexander Kluge', in *Alexander Kluge. Raw Materials for the Imagination*, ed. by Tara Forrest (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), pp. 22–32 (p. 24).

⁷⁵ On Adorno's modernist influence on Kluge, see Peter C. Lutze, *Alexander Kluge: The Last Modernist* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1988), pp. 17-23.

and intersubjectivity might emerge from the same cultural technologies that were destroying the old.⁷⁶

Kluge is thus more aligned with Benjamin here. For Kluge, new media offer precisely the opportunity to operate outside of dominant structures on various different levels: from the kinds of subjects represented, to the use of modernist formal devices and the creation of a ‘counter-public sphere’ of production. Kluge puts these strategies into practice – and reflects on them in his writing – across his entire ‘network’ of output. As Hansen comments, Adorno eventually softened his stance towards cinema, a move she claims was influenced by Kluge.⁷⁷ Yet, as a self-proclaimed ‘Benjamin-Anhänger’,⁷⁸ Kluge’s optimism regarding the possibilities of film is distinctly Benjaminian in character, a point that I underscore at different points throughout this thesis.

Since the call for a break with the old and the initiation of a new kind of filmmaking in the Oberhausen Manifesto, Kluge has written extensively on the subject of politics and film. Throughout his career, he has continued to describe himself primarily as a writer.⁷⁹ Kluge continued to write critically about the film industry and the role of art in society whilst gaining critical attention as a director. The main texts that I refer to in this thesis are those of a conditional nature: they prescribe the formal and content-based characteristics of film that renders it politically valid. For Kluge, there is no *Kultur* without *Politik*, and it is telling that a filmmaker like Harun Farocki would comment that: ‘es können wohl nicht so viele etwas sagen

⁷⁶ Miriam Hansen, ‘Foreword’, in Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. ix–xlix (p. xviii).

⁷⁷ Hansen, ‘Foreword’, p. xx. Hansen cites Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Transparencies on Film’ (1966), trans. by Thomas Y. Levin, *New German Critique*, 24–25 (1981–2), 199–205.

⁷⁸ Author interview with Alexander Kluge, May 2014.

⁷⁹ Margarete Wach, ‘Hieronymus im Mediengenhäus der Geschichte: Alexander Kluges “Baustellen-Artistik”, Literatur, Film, Fernsehen und Theorie’, *film-dienst*, 3 (2007), 22–28 (p. 22). Wach quotes Alexander Kluge’s Böll prize speech from 1993: ‘Ich bin und bleibe in erster Linie ein Buchautor’. For biographical information see Rainer Stollmann, *Alexander Kluge: zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius, 1998).

zu Film aber muß Kluge immer alles anthropologisch herleiten und als Kulturpolitik organisieren wollen?⁸⁰

A key work that I draw upon is *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung* (1972), which Kluge wrote together with the sociologist and assistant to Jürgen Habermas, Oskar Negt.⁸¹ This dense philosophical work is at once a criticism of the dominance of a bourgeois public sphere that fails to be relevant to the working classes (and thus denies their participation in the creation of community and political decision-making), as it is a call for structural change at various levels in order to create an oppositional public sphere (*Gegenöffentlichkeit*). Negt and Kluge paint a picture of a public sphere that serves only the interests of capitalist production (comprising ‘das Fernsehen, die Presse, die Verbands- und Parteienöffentlichkeit, der Bundestag, die Bundeswehr, die öffentliche Schule, die öffentlichen Lehrstühle an den Universitäten, die Justiz, die Kirchen, die Konzerne’⁸²). They analyse two forms of mass media in the book: the media cartel and television. I draw on this text in detail at various points in this thesis in order to show how, in line with Kracauer and Benjamin, Kluge is also concerned with legitimating the representation of the ‘real’ experiences of the modern subject in mass media.⁸³

With the exception of the interview I conducted with Alexander Kluge in May 2014, the texts I refer to were written during the time when Kluge was most active as a filmmaker (1970-1990). I cite many of the short, programmatic essays that Kluge published in the book accompanying the film, *Die Patriotin*,⁸⁴ as well as in *Ulmer Dramaturgien: Reibungsverluste*,⁸⁵ a collection of texts Kluge wrote with film critic Klaus Eder. The latter reflects on the work of the Ulm *Institut für Filmgestaltung*, as well as offering ‘Ausflüge in eine künftige – utopische? –

⁸⁰ Harun Farocki, ‘Arm in Arm’, *Filmkritik*, 292 (1981), 189–190 (p. 190).

⁸¹ Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung: Zur Organisationsanalyse von bürgerlicher und proletarischer Öffentlichkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972)

⁸² Negt and Kluge, p. 15.

⁸³ Miriam Hansen elaborates on crossovers between Kracauer, Benjamin and Kluge concerning the concept of ‘Erfahrung’ in ‘Foreword’, p. xvii.

⁸⁴ Alexander Kluge, *Die Patriotin* (Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins, 1979).

⁸⁵ Klaus Eder and Alexander Kluge, *Ulmer Dramaturgien: Reibungsverluste* (Munich: Hanser, 1980)

Filmlandschaft'.⁸⁶ These elaborate on where other films are failing, in his opinion, to challenge spectators' imaginations, and thus contribute to the widespread dumbing-down of the (cinema-going) public. Further, they clarify the filmic methods that Kluge believes further the goal of films that produce critical spectators.

I also look at the article that Kluge wrote in response to a speech given by Interior Minister Friedrich Zimmermann in 1983, in which Kluge attacks contemporary culture politics for taking commercial (box office) success as a measure of a film's merit.⁸⁷ Zimmermann played a key role in re-channelling state funding into commercial productions, a move which is often cited as a reason for the decline of New German Cinema from 1982 onwards.⁸⁸ Zimmermann most famously said: 'Der Steuerzahler will nicht provoziert, der möchte unterhalten werden',⁸⁹ a sentiment to which Kluge strongly objects – the reasons for which he outlines comprehensively in the article I draw upon – and also which stands in opposition to the function of film according to Kracauer and Benjamin, too.

Tara Forrest is one of a number of scholars who show how, for Kluge, television represents an apt medium for the reconciliation of the theory outlined in *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung* with practice.⁹⁰ By including this theorist in my theoretical framework, it may then seem like an oversight to not consider German-language television in the empirical body of

⁸⁶ Eder and Kluge, back cover.

⁸⁷ Alexander Kluge, 'Verabredung mit einem Toten' (1984), in Hans Helmut Prinzler and Eric Rentschler (eds), *Augenzeugen: 100 Texte neuer deutscher Filmemacher* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Autoren, 1988), pp. 474–482 (p. 476)

⁸⁸ See Rentschler, 'From New German Cinema', 265–266.

⁸⁹ Friedrich Zimmermann at the awards ceremony for the German Film Prize on 25 June 1983, quoted in Eric Rentschler, 'Eigensinn und Vielfalt: Ein Vierteljahrhundert neuer deutscher Film', in Prinzler and Rentschler (eds), pp. 13–26 (p. 13).

⁹⁰ Tara Forrest, 'Raw Materials for the Imagination: Kluge's Work for Television', in *Alexander Kluge. Raw Materials for the Imagination*, ed. by Tara Forrest (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), pp. 305–317. See also Christian Schulte and Winfried Siebers (eds), *Kluges Fernsehen: Alexander Kluges Kulturmagazine* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002) and Matthias Uecker, *Anti-Fernsehen? Alexander Kluges Fernsehproduktionen* (Marburg: Schüren, 2000). As founder and managing director of dctp (development company for television program mbH), Kluge has also produced over 1500 hours of television broadcast material since 1988.

this thesis. However, I am interested precisely in political optimism concerning film as a medium in an era of advanced capitalism, and it is for this reason that I focus primarily on Kluge's texts on cinema.

CONTEMPORARY GERMAN AND AUSTRIAN FILM

The films I read through the lens of Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge cut across genre. I consider filmmakers whose works are not usually compared in the same study, such as arthouse icon, Michael Haneke, and director of social tragic-comedies, Andreas Dresen. The films are shot on 16mm, 32mm, HD, and HDTV, making this study one that explores what constitutes 'contemporary' filmmaking practices in an age of digital reproducibility (which may also include the decision not to film on digital cameras). I tap into a number of the debates sparked by Rentschler in his 'Cinema of Consensus' article, approaching them from the perspective of Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge. I contribute to the growing body of scholarship on the *Berliner Schule*, asking what makes films by directors Elke Hauck, Angela Schanelec and Valeska Grisebach political in neo-Marxist terms. The term *Berliner Schule* became common usage following a review of Thomas Arslan's *Der schöne Tag* (2001) by film critic Rainer Gansera, to whom it is credited.⁹¹ The label was imposed on directors rather than one that was chosen, and is used to delimit a body of works from the beginning of the 2000s onwards that share stylistic commonalities. The *Berliner Schule* has been a driving force for critics and scholars arguing that German cinema is no longer consensual, and its films are the subject of three new books in 2013 alone.⁹² There are some striking parallels between the reception of, and

⁹¹ Rainer Gansera, 'Glücks-Pickpocket: Thomas Arslans traumhafter Film "Der schöne Tag"', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Nov. 3 and 4, 2001. Gansera was not however the first to coin the term. See Cook, Koepnick, Kopp and Prager, 'Introduction', p. 3.

⁹² Cook, Koepnick, Kopp and Prager (eds), *Berlin School Glossary*, Rajendra Roy and Anke Leweke (eds), *The Berlin School: Films from the Berliner Schule* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2013), and Marco Abel, *The Counter-Cinema of the Berlin School* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2013).

backlash against, the New German Cinema and the *Berliner Schule* in their respective times by figures like Dominik Graf and Bernd Eichinger, with echoing accusations of ‘artistic indulgence’.⁹³ Scholars like Marco Abel, on the other hand, argue for the political significance and relevance of a body of works that has been accused of navel-gazing.⁹⁴ In my analyses of three films that are considered part of the *Berliner Schule*, my thesis also represents a defence of the politics of their images.

Perhaps the most obvious point of continuation between this study and the body of scholarship described above is my use of the language spoken by the films’ protagonists to demarcate the films I analyse. Like Rentschler and the other scholars to whom I refer, I am therefore also contributing to debates on national cinema at a time when the idea of one ‘cinema’ affiliated with a particular country rests on unsound assumptions of coherence and unity on multiple different levels. Andrew Higson’s claim in 1989 that the designation of films according to nationality was becoming ‘increasingly problematic’⁹⁵ was re-affirmed twenty years later by Randall Halle, who writes that ‘it has become increasingly impossible to invoke a transparent, self-evident relationship between the nation and state’.⁹⁶ Stephan Schindler and Lutz Koepnick write that:

It is one of the historical ironies of the development of German film studies, in particular in the United States, that this renewed exploration of the national in the

⁹³ See Rentschler, ‘From New German Cinema’, p. 264 for Rentschler’s overview of the charges of ‘artistic indulgence’ levelled at the New German Cineastes, for example. Compare this with criticism of the *Berliner Schule* by Dominik Graf, who accuses the filmmakers of using ‘die feste Form, das visuelle Konzept’ as a veil for their unwillingness to engage with narrative. See Dominik Graf, ‘Unerlebte Filme’, *Schnitt*, 43 (2006), 62–65 (p. 64).

⁹⁴ Marco Abel, ‘Intensifying Life: The Cinema of the “Berlin School”,’ *Cineaste*, 33 (2008) <http://www.cineaste.com/articles/the-berlin-school.htm> [accessed January 2014]. Abel quotes Ekkerhard Knörer.

⁹⁵ Andrew Higson, ‘The Concept of National Cinema’, *Screen*, 30 (1989), 36–47.

⁹⁶ Randall Halle, *German Film after Germany: Toward a Transnational Aesthetic* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), p. 24.

1990s occurred precisely during a period in which we experienced an accelerated dissolution of the modern nation-state at the global level.⁹⁷

Indeed, it is precisely this coincidence of two major geo-political shifts – the global phenomena of globalisation and transnationalism, and the fall of the Iron Curtain and the founding of unified Germany – that makes German screen studies a stimulating area of study. In line with other scholars who thematise the difficulty of a purely national approach to film studies,⁹⁸ I heed Halle's warning against 'romantic nationalist essentialism',⁹⁹ proving that national cultures are not bound to produce a specific aesthetic by drawing on a range of different-sounding and -looking German-language films. Furthermore, though I consider German-speaking directors, my object of interest is not primarily their commentary on German-speaking societies, but rather the supra-national themes of work, class and violence in western European neo-liberal democracies.

The objective of this thesis – to identify traces of a German-Jewish, Frankfurt School political optimism in contemporary German-language films – thus raises questions about the 'Germanness' of the continuum I investigate. In my pursuit of optimism, my approach is more holistic than other studies on German cinema: I include works by filmmakers who trained – and set their films in – eastern Germany, western Germany, and in Austria. I also study one French-language film by the German-born, Austrian-residing 'pan-European' director,¹⁰⁰ Michael Haneke. I consider the works of four directors who are associated with the 'New Austrian Film': documentarist Michael Glawogger, Michael Haneke, Valeska Grisebach, and Ulrich Seidl. This eclectic movement was not born out of any particular manifesto; it is instead

⁹⁷ Stephan K. Schindler and Lutz Koepnick, 'Introduction', in *The Cosmopolitan Screen: German Cinema and the Global Imaginary, 1945 to the Present*, ed. by Stephan K. Schindler and Lutz Koepnick (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), pp 1–24 (p. 4).

⁹⁸ See e.g. Fisher and Prager (eds), pp. 13–16, Uecker, p. 12, and Halle, pp. 1–29.

⁹⁹ Halle, p. 28.

¹⁰⁰ Robert von Dassanowsky and Oliver C. Speck, 'Introduction', in *New Austrian Film*, ed. by Robert von Dassanowsky and Oliver C. Speck (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), pp 1–20 (p. 10).

characterised by the filmmakers' continued challenging of official discourses on history and national image, for example.¹⁰¹ Von Dassanowsky and Speck write: 'the attacks of New Austrian Film are not aimed at a specific Austrian petit-bourgeois milieu, but at the general mode of existence that carries this ideological apparatus and that lingers on not only in Austria'.¹⁰² This thesis is therefore also interested in the scope and limitations of theories by Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge – theories that are directly and indirectly informed by the thinkers' experiences of German fascism – in transnational contexts.

The organising structure of my thesis is as follows: at the beginning of each chapter, I elaborate on a theoretical strand that is common to Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge. I then use this as a basis for asking specific questions relating to the 'political' in different post-Wende films. Chapter Two is interested primarily in subject matter. I ask whether the imperative of representing the German working-class on-screen expressed by each of the three thinkers remains. Can we speak of a 'twenty-first-century *Arbeiterfilm*'? The large-scale outsourcing of manual labour and the transformation of Germany into an economic power based on technological innovation rather than production leads us to ask: who is the German-speaking worker? Is he or she as revolutionarily minded as the heroes of *Battleship Potemkin* lauded by Walter Benjamin?¹⁰³ Michael Glawogger and Elke Hauck offer two divergent answers to these questions. Glawogger's documentary from 2004, *Workingman's Death: 5 Bilder zur Arbeit im 21. Jahrhundert*, offers images of workers around the world, and defines German workers in relation to these, whereas Elke Hauck paints a portrait of local workers in former East Germany in her film *Karger* from 2007. Reading these two films in the tradition of the German worker film offers, I argue, a valuable perspective on labour, migration and globalisation that is otherwise absent from scholarship on German-language cinema. The thematic focus on *Karger* in this

¹⁰¹ Dassanowsky and Speck, p. 8.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁰³ Walter Benjamin, 'Erwiderung an Oscar A. H. Schmitz' (1927), in *GS* 2, pp. 747–755 (p. 753).

chapter also represents an attempt to restore an emphasis on the political content of *Berliner Schule* films – which *Karger* is considered to be¹⁰⁴ – rather than focusing on the politics of their form.

In Chapter Three, I turn my attention to Kracauer's *Theory of Film* and show how his vision of filmic realism diverges quite substantially from the realist practices advocated by Benjamin and Kluge, both of whom were heavily influenced by Brecht's ideas on this topic. Each of the three theorists grapples with common concerns, however: what is the most truthful way of capturing reality through the lens of a film camera? How is it possible to represent a world that is deeply disappointing in a way that does not merely affirm the prevailing conditions? I look at three films that, in different ways, reflect the complexities of this relationship between the camera and the realities it pretends to record. Kracauer offers the framework for my reading of *Marseille* (2004) by dffb graduate Angela Schanelec, who, together with Thomas Arslan and Christian Petzold, is considered a first-generation *Berliner Schule* director. My approach to *Marseille* via Kracauer contributes to – and looks to deepen – discussions of the observational filming style of the *Berliner Schule*.

The more radical kinds of realism put forward by Benjamin and Kluge inform my analyses of Andreas Dresen's *Halt auf freier Strecke* (2011) and of the documentary *Hat Wolff von Amerongen Konkursdelikte begangen?* (2004) by the lesser-known Austrian filmmaker Gerhard Friedl. I show how Kluge and Negt's conception of *Gegenöffentlichkeit* renders *Halt auf freier Strecke* political through the director's commitment to telling real stories. Furthermore, scholarship on Friedl's films is very limited in scope, consisting only of short film reviews. My reading of *Hat Wolff von Amerongen Konkursdelikte begangen?* through Benjamin and Kluge will, I hope, draw more attention to Friedl's challenging work. This chapter thus offers a new constellation of German-

¹⁰⁴ Marco Abel, 'Intensifying Life: The Cinema of the "Berlin School"'.

language films analysed together under the umbrella of the ‘real’, and I draw attention to some unexpected points of continuation between them.

Chapters Four and Five both address the idea that the modern subject is alienated and distracted, and that film, contrary to Adorno’s assertion in his letter to Benjamin, has transformative potential. Chapter Four shows how Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge demand that a film engage viewers intellectually by rejecting storylines and formal devices that allow it to be ‘consumed’. The idea of fragmentation is central to this chapter: it underpins the theory common to the three thinkers, and offers conceptual framework for my reading of two films by Michael Haneke: *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls* (1994) and *Code Inconnu: Récit incomplet de divers voyages* (2000). I illuminate the ways in which Haneke seeks to bring about a critical mode of spectatorship in his viewers, using techniques advocated by Benjamin, Kracauer, and Kluge.

Other scholars have read Haneke’s oeuvre in the terms of the Frankfurt School, and my analysis via the fragment is not a new approach.¹⁰⁵ The fragmented condition of the postmodern subject – as a result of a disjuncture between mediated images and real life in a digital age, or tensions between the local and global at the end of the twentieth century and the

¹⁰⁵ For example, Roy Grundmann employs Adorno’s only essay on film in a formal analysis of *71 Fragmente* and *Code Inconnu* in ‘Between Adorno and Lyotard: Michael Haneke’s Aesthetic of Fragmentation’, in *A Companion to Michael Haneke*, ed. by Roy Grundmann (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 371–419. He draws on Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Filmtransparente’ (1966), *Schriften* 10.1, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann with Gretel Adorno, Susan Buck-Morss and Klaus Schultz (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), pp. 353–361. See Harald Meindl’s use of the sublime as conceived by Adorno and Lyotard in analysing Haneke’s depiction of violence in Harald Meindl, “‘Ästhetik-Gewalt-Erhabenes’: Statement zu Haneke und dem Zusammenhang von Gewalt, Ästhetik und dem Sublimen”, in *Visible Violence: Sichtbare und verschleierte Gewalt im Film; Beiträge zum Symposium ‘Film and Modernity: Violence, Sacrifice and Religion in Graz 1997’*, ed. by Gerhard Larcher, Franz Grabner and Christian Wessely (Münster: Lit Verlag, 1998), pp. 77–84; Temenuga Trifonova looks at *Der Siebente Kontinent*, *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*, and *Code Inconnu* (which she, too, pairs thematically with *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*) in ‘Michael Haneke and the Politics of Film Form’, in *The Cinema of Michael Haneke*, ed. by Ben McCann and David Sorfa (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), pp. 65–84.

beginning of the twenty-first – is a theme that features prominently in Haneke criticism.¹⁰⁶ For example, Temenuga Trifonova reads Haneke against a similar background to that deployed in this thesis and acknowledges the relevance of both Benjamin and Kracauer in her criticism, however our approaches differ quite significantly. Whilst I subscribe to her statement that ‘Haneke views film as an alternative public sphere with a demythologising and democratising potential which he – following Nietzsche, Kracauer, Benjamin and Adorno – locates in the fragment’,¹⁰⁷ our conception of what constitutes ‘democratising potential’ is different, a point that I demonstrate in Chapter Four by drawing also on Alexander Kluge’s notion of the autonomous spectator. My approach most clearly approximates that of Tara Forrest, given that she also analyses Haneke’s use of fragmentation via Kluge, Adorno and Benjamin, and also looks at *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*.¹⁰⁸ Though we both align Haneke’s film with Kluge’s potential regarding the utopian film, my reading is more detailed and takes *Code Inconnu* into account, too. Where Forrest’s argument hinges on Adorno and negative utopianism, mine reads Haneke through Kluge via Kant.

Chapter Five also takes as its starting point the critique of the alienated subject articulated by Benjamin, Kracauer, and Kluge, and draws in particular on Benjamin’s notion of the filmic ‘Schockwirkung’¹⁰⁹ as a means of creating a more alert – and ultimately critical – spectator. ‘Alert’ in this chapter has a different meaning than simply intellectually engaged: here I am more concerned with how directors may be seen as tapping into the political

¹⁰⁶ See Ricardo Domizio, ‘Digital Cinema and the “Schizophrenic” Image: The Case of Michael Haneke’s *Hidden*’, in McCann and Sorfa (eds), pp. 237–246, and Oliver C. Speck, ‘Thinking the Event: The Virtual in Michael Haneke’s Films’, in McCann and Sorfa (eds), pp. 49–64. See also Mattias Frey, ‘The Message and the Medium: Haneke’s Film Theory and Digital Praxis’, in *On Michael Haneke*, ed. by Brian Price and John David Rhodes (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2010), pp. 153–166, and Mattias Frey, ‘Supermodernity, Sick Eros and the Video Narcissus: Benny’s Video in the Course of Theory and Time’ in McCann and Sorfa (eds), pp. 151–162.

¹⁰⁷ Trifonova, p. 67.

¹⁰⁸ Tara Forrest, ‘A Negative Utopia: Michael Haneke’s Fragmentary Cinema’, in Terri Ginsberg, and Andrea Mensch, *A Companion to German Cinema* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2012), pp. 553–572.

¹⁰⁹ Walter Benjamin, ‘Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit’, in *GS* 1, pp. 471–508 (p. 503, 503 footnote 29 et passim).

potential of the *physical* experience of the moving image. I refer extensively to the epilogue of Benjamin's *Kunstwerk* essay, specifically to the connection that he draws between (sensory) alienation and violence. In this final chapter, the urgency of the optimism expressed by Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge becomes clear, as I show how it is bound up by the direct and indirect experience of fascism. As I show, the (re-) sensitisation of the viewing subject is a political imperative for these three thinkers, for the alienated, numb subject is open to manipulation to violent ends. In this way, Chapter Five confronts the core question of the thesis head-on: in the images and sounds of Germany's and Austria's neo-liberal democracies, how pertinent are concerns regarding the link between an alienated populace and violence on a mass scale? To what extent do contemporary directors exhibit what I term a 'politics of sensitivity', where 'sensitive' is understood in Benjaminian terms?

I turn to two formally very different films in my attempt to grapple with these questions: *Hundstage* (2001) by Ulrich Seidl, and *Sehnsucht* (2006) by Valeska Grisebach. By searching for different kinds of 'shocks' in the two films, I look to draw some broader conclusions about the spectatorial experience in twenty-first century German-speaking countries. Whilst Benjamin's *Kunstwerk* essay is a popular point of reference in a range of different disciplines, it is largely employed as a polemical device or a way of opening discussions on art and fascism, specifically the manipulation of the former by the latter. The programmatic parts of the essay – especially those relating to shock and distraction – have been the focus of a number of articles on Benjamin,¹¹⁰ but significantly fewer in screen studies. I hope to show that the idea of shock, adapted and detached slightly from Benjamin's original

¹¹⁰ See for example Howard Eiland, "Reception in Distraction", in *Walter Benjamin and Art*, ed. by Andrew Benjamin (London: Continuum, 2005), pp. 3–13; Susan Buck-Morss, 'Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered', in *October*, 62 (1992), 3–41; and Andrew Benjamin, 'Boredom and Distraction: The Moods of Modernity', in *Walter Benjamin and History*, ed. by Andrew Benjamin (London: continuum, 2005), pp. 156–170.

articulation of the term, continues to offer a productive way of theorising the relationship between film, violence and experience.

Thus there are a number of theories that I am applying in novel ways to these films: the reading of contemporary German-language films against the tradition of the *Arbeiterfilm*; an in-depth analysis of the *Berliner Schule* film *Marseille* through Kracauer's oft-dismissed *Theory of Film*, considerations of the commercial viability of the 'radical' realisms of Benjamin and Kluge; the pairing of Haneke and Kluge; and the application of Benjamin's shock theory to these particular film-texts. Further, throughout the thesis I reflect on the relevance of my diachronic approach: what are the perils of consolidating and updating theories that diverge significantly in parts, and which are from very different historical contexts? How useful is speculative materialism in an age of advanced capitalism? Bergfelder, Carter and Göktürk argue that:

the legitimization crisis experienced in western Marxism following capitalism's neo-liberal regeneration in the early 1980s, and the collapse of state socialism as an apparently viable alternative after 1989, provoked in German film history a new awareness of classical Marxism's unreliability as a founding paradigm.¹¹¹

Whilst this thesis may then appear unfashionably leftist, I look to show that there remain insights to be gained from the process of reading contemporary films through a neo-Marxist lens. For as Hansen says of Kracauer and Benjamin, and which may also be said of Kluge, the thinkers are 'more interested in what cinema *does*, the kind of sensory-perceptual, mimetic experience it enabled, than in what cinema *is*'.¹¹² I look to illustrate the currency and salience of this approach in the following chapters.

¹¹¹ Tim Bergfelder, Erica Carter and Deniz Göktürk, 'Introduction', in Bergfelder, Carter and Göktürk (eds), pp. 1–12 (p. 5).

¹¹² Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, p. xvii.

CHAPTER TWO

THE TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY WORKER FILM: *WORKINGMAN'S DEATH* (2004) BY MICHAEL GLAWOGGER, AND *KARGER* (2007) BY ELKE HAUCK

Chapters Three, Four and Five of this thesis will focus on some of the formal elements highlighted by Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge as opening up possibilities for politically and socially engaged filmmaking. The focus of this chapter, however, is primarily subject matter. Without attempting to sever form from content completely, I focus on two specific narrative threads and plot elements that the three thinkers believe should be addressed by a film for it to fulfil its role as a vehicle for change: firstly, a critique of capitalism through the figure of the worker, and secondly, the depiction of characters in a working-class milieu. Though writing in different political, social and historical contexts, Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge share a number of concerns regarding these particular aspects of the subject matter of the German-language films presented to audiences. Given the explosive changes that took place in every social sphere during the first half of the twentieth century, it is perhaps surprising that there are some very concrete commonalities between the narrative elements that Benjamin and Kracauer considered imperative for audiences in Weimar Germany, and those that Kluge advocated for post-war West German spectators. I then look to extend the theoretical continuum by applying these ideas to two post-Wende films: *Workingman's Death* (2004) by Michael Glawogger, and *Karger* (2007) by Elke Hauck.

In the sections ‘Benjamin, Kracauer, and the Proletarian Films of the 1920s’ and ‘Alexander Kluge and the Revival of the *Arbeiterfilme* in West Germany, 1968-1976’, I ask why each of the theorists deemed the worker and working-class subjects worthy of representation, and I highlight the points of intersection between them. In the close film readings that follow, I question whether it is possible to identify a continuation of the thematic trajectory into the present day: what kind of worker is portrayed in films aimed at twenty-first century audiences, if any? Is the figure, or the nature of the work, gendered? Is the call to revolution in the proletarian films of the Weimar Republic completely absent from contemporary film? Is the term ‘proletarian’ in any way still relevant in cinema, as Kluge argues in his 1972 publication *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung*?¹ To these ends, I consider whether contemporary films may be read against the background of the specifically German-historical ‘proletarian cinema’ and the *Arbeiterfilm*. To what extent does the leftist-political, anti-hegemonic spark in Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge’s writings on filmic content continue to ignite the works of contemporary filmmakers?

BENJAMIN, KRACAUER, AND THE PROLETARIAN FILMS OF THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

Benjamin was less well informed about current trends in German film than Kracauer, but the intellectual circles in which he was moving, along with the German Left’s interest in the post-October Revolution transformations in Russia – and their celluloid representations – meant that he certainly paid some attention to filmic developments. His more cine-literate

¹ See Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, ‘Vorrede’, in Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung: Zur Organisationsanalyse von bürgerlicher und proletarischer Öffentlichkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), pp. 7–16.

acquaintances included the dramatist Bertolt Brecht, whom he met in the first half of 1929,² Bulgarian director Slávan Dudow, and the composer Hanns Eisler. These individuals form part of a cluster of artists and intellectuals whose cinematic endeavours shape the ways that both Benjamin and Kracauer write about film.

The group was concentrated around the small film company Prometheus Film-Verleih- und Vertriebs-GmbH, which was established in 1925 for the sole purpose of making Sergei Eisenstein's revolutionary propaganda film *Battleship Potemkin* accessible to German audiences.³ The leader of the *Internationale Arbeiterhilfe*, an acquaintance of Benjamin's, Willi Münzenberg, was instrumental in establishing the tiny film company. Prometheus went on to produce and distribute its own German-language films, which differed from more commercially successful films of the late twenties and early thirties. Notable films produced by Prometheus include Phil Jutzi's *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* (1929) and *Kuhle Wampe oder: Wem gehört die Welt?* (1931-32) directed by Slávan Dudow. These and the other films made between 1926 and 1931 are collectively referred to as the 'proletarian films' of the Weimar Republic, loosely defined by their sympathetic and 'authentic' depiction of a working-class milieu and the political orientation of the production company. These two principal cinematic movements – Russian Revolution films and the subsequent German-language proletarian films that were made by Prometheus – would prove influential for both Benjamin and Kracauer and inform their respective criticism relating to filmic content.

Over the course of the Weimar Republic, the commercial film industry was prolific in producing an increasing number of popular and art films, including, amongst others, high-budget literary and theatrical adaptations, moralistic *Aufklärungsfilme*, as well as the

² See Walter Benjamin, *Briefe I*, ed. by Gershom Sholem and Theodor W. Adorno (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978), p. 492.

³ For further information on Prometheus, refer to Günter Agde and Alexander Schwarz (eds), *Die Rote Traumfabrik: Meschrabpom-Film und Prometheus 1921–1936* (Berlin: Bertz+Fischer, 2012), and Rolf Surmann, *Die Münzenberg-Legende: Zur Publizistik der revolutionären deutschen Arbeiterbewegung 1921–1933* (Cologne: Prometh Verlag, 1982), pp. 175–183.

expressionist films that Kracauer subsequently, and controversially, read as promoting conservative or reactionary social mores.⁴ From the beginning of his career as a reviewer for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* starting in 1921, Kracauer seeks to illuminate the ideological underpinnings of the commercially successful productions, mostly from UFA. In the essays he writes on film as well as in film reviews, he argues that the entertainment films must be read with a more analytical eye given their mass appeal and the conservative agenda of the film investors. Bruce Murray notes that in the early twenties, entertainment film and politics were considered to be separate arenas, and that political parties thought film had several specific uses: it could be used as a tool for education, conveying certain moral and health standards, and also to facilitate scientific observation of the natural world.⁵ Kracauer's consideration of film in its wider context thus laid bare a link between entertainment film and politics that was largely unacknowledged in party politics at the time.

Both Benjamin and Kracauer had an ambiguous relationship with cultural events taking place in Russia; though neither of them endorsed a proletarian uprising in Germany, they were inspired by the new wave of cultural organisations in Russia, the *Proletkult*, born of the October Revolution of 1917. The two thinkers began to discuss new forms of expression befitting the unique, collective experiences of the proletariat. In revolutionary Russia, the goal was the cultural independence and self-determination of the worker: it was thought that workers must develop their own artistic and intellectual discourses in order to liberate themselves from the cultural forms of the elite, which sought to maintain the status quo.⁶ As a writer and literary critic himself, Benjamin was particularly enthused by the organisation of

⁴ For an overview of the critical reception to *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of German Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), see e.g. Martin Jay, 'The Extraterritorial Life of Siegfried Kracauer', *Salmagundi*, 31/31 (1975/76), 49–106, (pp. 72–73).

⁵ Bruce Murray, *Film and the German Left in the Weimar Republic: From Caligari to Kuhle Wampe* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), pp. 31–35.

⁶ Richard Lorenz, 'Einleitung', in *Proletarische Kulturrevolution in Sowjetrußland (1917-1921)*, ed. by Richard Lorenz, trans. by Uwe Brüggemann and Gert Meyer (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1969), pp. 7–16 (p. 7).

Russian proletarian writers' associations: 'Tausende von neuen Autoren und Hunderttausende von neuen Lesern wollen vor allem einmal gezählt und dann in Kadres neuer ABC-Schützen eingeteilt sein, die nach politischem Kommando exerzieren und deren Munition das Alphabet ist'.⁷ Proletarian theatre also won his praise, especially dramatist Erwin Piscator's commitment to the arts in Germany. Piscator was one of the first to import some of the ideas of his Russian counterparts to Germany, and organised the *Proletarisches Theater-Bühne der revolutionären Arbeiter Groß-Berlins* together with Hermann Schüller in 1920.⁸ However, Soviet filmmaking is particularly important for Benjamin in this context for two reasons: firstly, it is the arena in which Benjamin sees the greatest difference in achievement – political and cultural – between Germany and Russia. Secondly, Benjamin considers Russian film to be an art form that is best able to capture the spirit of proletarian experience.

Some Soviet cinema made it on to German screens, and Benjamin had a better insight than most into Russian film culture thanks to the two months he spent in Moscow (December 1926 and January 1927). Benjamin wrote two essays on the subject of Russian film, which were published in the same edition of *Die literarische Welt* in March 1927: 'Zur Lage der russischen Filmkunst' and 'Erwiderung an Oscar A.H. Schmitz'.⁹ The paper commissioned the pieces, and the latter is a reply to a scathing review written by Oscar A. H. Schmitz on the subject of Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*, criticising the film's 'unbelievable' storyline.¹⁰ It is not just the technical excellence of Russian directors that Benjamin considers superior to German

⁷ Walter Benjamin, 'Die politische Gruppierung der russischen Schriftsteller' (1927), in *GS* 2, pp. 743–747 (p. 747).

⁸ Walter Benjamin, 'Piscator und Russland' (1929), in *GS* 4, pp. 543–545. He writes: 'Sie setzt sich vor, die neue nachrevolutionäre Bühne mit einem Geiste zu durchdringen, der die lebendigen Elemente aus dem Erbe der Theaterkultur der Schärfung und Erhellung des Klassenbewußtseins dienstbar macht.' (p. 544).

⁹ Walter Benjamin, 'Zur Lage der russischen Filmkunst' (1927), in *GS* 2, pp. 474–751, and 'Erwiderung an Oscar A.H. Schmitz' (1927), in *GS* 2, pp. 751–755. The latter was published together with Oscar A.H. Schmitz's piece, 'Potemkin und Tendenzkunst', under the title, 'Eine Diskussion über russische Filmkunst und kollektivistische Kunst überhaupt'. See editorial notes in *GS* 2, pp. 1486–1489 (p. 1486).

¹⁰ See editorial notes in *GS* 2, pp. 1487.

efforts.¹¹ As I described in Chapter One, Benjamin regards the transition from bourgeois, individualist art forms to proletarian, collective, reproducible works of art as imperative in an age of technological modernity. For him, then, *Battleship Potemkin* represents the successful attainment of an art form for the modern man. One of the reasons he gives is the subject matter:

Das Proletariat ist der Held jener Räume, an deren Abenteuer klopfenden Herzens im Kino sich der Bürger verschenkt, weil er das ‘Schöne’ auch und gerade dort, wo es ihm von Vernichtung seiner Klasse spricht, genießen muß. Das Proletariat ist aber Kollektivum, wie diese Räume Räume des Kollektivs sind. Und hier am menschlichen Kollektiv erst kann der Film jene prismatische Arbeit vollenden, welche er am Milieu begonnen hat. Der ‘Potemkin’ hat epochal gerade darum gewirkt, weil sich das nie vorher so deutlich erkennen ließ. Hier zum erstenmal hat die Massenbewegung den ganz und gar architektonischen [...] Charakter, der erst das Recht ihrer Kinoaufnahme erweist. Kein anderes Mittel könnte dies bewegte Kollektivum wiedergeben.¹²

For the first time, according to Benjamin, the masses appear as structured, a characteristic that is a precondition for political empowerment. It is not just the representation of the proletariat on-screen that is novel and significant for him, but also that it is politicised: the revolutionaries are acting out the conditions of liberation ‘von der Hypnose einer Kultur’ – that is, the Tsarist regime – which is one of the key aims of the *Proletkult* movement.¹³

When Benjamin writes about *Battleship Potemkin*, it is not the specific political objectives of the proletariat on which he focuses, but its collective quality; he is therefore not endorsing a German revolution, but rather greater visibility and agency of the German working classes. As a cultural Marxist, he believes, as do Kracauer and Kluge, that an elite minority should no

¹¹ In his Moscow diaries, Benjamin writes that Russian cinema: ‘beruht auf einem hemmungslosen Spiele mit der Technik. Alles Technische aber hat hier Weihe, nichts wird ernster genommen als Technik.’ Walter Benjamin, ‘Moskauer Tagebuch’ (1926-7), in *GS* 6, pp. 292–409 (p. 340).

¹² Benjamin, ‘Erwiderung an Oscar A. H. Schmitz’, p. 753.

¹³ Lorenz, p. 7.

longer preside over the realm of culture. Thus, in the few texts in which he praises film as a medium as well as specific films, an orientation towards the masses in a film's content is a key element of his critique. Implicit in Benjamin's acclaim for Russian film is the notion that, whilst the representation of the proletariat is a necessary starting point, the ultimate goal is its *self*-representation. In the first of his *Pariser Briefe*, written eight years later, in the same year that the *Kunstwerk* essay was published, Benjamin also addresses the self-determination of the masses in the cultural sphere, and argues that art is a crucial force for political change:

[die Elite] wünscht in der Kunst keine Selbstverständigung der Masse. Denn dann müßte diese Kunst eine proletarische Klassenkunst sein, durch die die Wirklichkeit der Lohnarbeit und der Ausbeutung zu ihrem Recht, das heißt auf den Weg ihrer Abschaffung käme.¹⁴

Of course, Benjamin's struggle with the tension between theory and practice – between the intellectual and the worker – is a theme that recurs throughout his writings. In the context of film, then, the critical filmmaker must work outside capitalist structures of production and exhibit political *Tendenz*.¹⁵ Regarding subject matter, the *tendenziöse/r* filmmaker must expose hegemonic power structures and seek to incite change. Yet the comprehensive democratisation of the arts demands more than this:

Ein Teil der im russischen Film begegnenden Darsteller sind nicht Darsteller in unserem Sinn, sondern Leute, die *sich* – und zwar in erster Linie in ihrem Arbeitsprozeß – darstellen. In Westeuropa verbietet die kapitalistische Ausbeutung des Films dem legitimen Anspruch, den der heutige Mensch auf sein Reproduziertwerden hat, die Berücksichtigung.¹⁶

The use of lay actors and actresses who play themselves is one way that Benjamin conceives of

¹⁴ Walter Benjamin, 'Pariser Brief 1' (1936), in *GS* 3, pp. 482–494 (p. 488).

¹⁵ Walter Benjamin, 'Der Autor als Produzent' (1934), in *GS* 2, pp. 683–702.

¹⁶ Walter Benjamin, 'Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit', in *GS* 1, pp. 471–508 (p. 494). Emphasis in original.

the self-realisation of the proletariat.

Kracauer's attitude towards Russia was more reserved than Benjamin's, and changed over the course of the 1920s. Ingrid Belke offers a detailed account of Kracauer's at times contradictory stance towards the political situation and the transformation of the arts under Lenin and then Stalin.¹⁷ She notes that the peak of his revolutionary enthusiasm – an essay he submitted for the Moritz-Manheimer-Stiftung essay prize in 1919, where the subject was 'Sind Menschenliebe, Gerechtigkeit und Duldsamkeit an eine bestimmte Staatsform geknüpft und welche Staatsform gibt die beste Gewähr für ihre Durchführung?'¹⁸ – was tempered with the opinion that any such impulses are revolutionary only in the moment that they arise, to then be subject to a process of 'Verknöcherung' and 'Verkrustung' when crystallised in laws and institutions.¹⁹ By the late twenties, Kracauer's political stance was more moderate: whilst rejecting the rhetoric of the national right in Germany, he also set himself apart from leftist intellectuals who called for the direct translation of the Soviet model in Germany.²⁰ Rather, he considered Russia to be a positive, practical role model on economic, architectural and technological fronts; it offered an alternative to what Belke terms the 'Vernunft- und Intellektfeindlichkeit, mit ihrer Realitätsflucht und ihrem ambivalenten Verhältnis zur Technik' that Kracauer identified in German nationalism.²¹

Kracauer's writing about film exemplifies his qualified admiration for Russian cultural and political forms. Belke comments that it was likely a combination of factors that piqued his

¹⁷ Ingrid Belke, 'Siegfried Kracauer als Beobachter der jungen Sowjetunion', in *Siegfried Kracauer: Neue Interpretationen*, ed. by Michael Kessler and Thomas Y. Levin (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1990), pp. 17–38.

¹⁸ Belke, p. 20. Siegfried Kracauer, 'Sind Menschenliebe, Gerechtigkeit und Duldsamkeit an eine bestimmte Staatsform geknüpft und welche Staatsform gibt die beste Gewähr für ihre Durchführung?', in *Werke 9.2: Frühere Schriften aus dem Nachlaß*, ed. by Ingrid Belke, with Sabine Biebl (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004), pp. 79–138.

¹⁹ Siegfried Kracauer, 'Sind Menschenliebe, Gerechtigkeit und Duldsamkeit', quoted in Belke, p. 20.

²⁰ For a more comprehensive examination of Kracauer's relationship with the political Left during the Weimar Republic, see Martin Jay, 'The Extraterritorial Life of Siegfried Kracauer', *Salmagundi*, 31/31 (1975/76), 49–106 (pp. 60–66).

²¹ Belke, p. 29.

interest in Russian film and which led him to review all the Russian Revolution films that were shown in German cinemas: firstly, a somewhat illusionary and stereotyped image of Russian culture stemming from his admiration for Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy and Turgenev; secondly, a more intense interest in Marx; and thirdly, conversations with Benjamin upon his return from Moscow.²² Kracauer's writings about Russian cinema again emphasise its exemplary character:

Letztlich wollte Kracauer auch mit den Aufsätzen über die Sowjetunion die politischen und sozialen Verhältnisse in Deutschland ändern; die neuen Inhalte und Ziele des sozialistischen Umbaus sollten dabei die Rolle eines Katalysators übernehmen, der auch in der deutschen Gesellschaft einen Erkenntnisprozeß auslösen [...] könnte.²³

Like Benjamin, he marvels at the technical skill of Russian directors, but it is not only the technology behind the scenes that he celebrates in his reviews of Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*; it is the depiction of man and technology side-by-side – that is, the cinematic representation of the technological revolution and its effects on the human psyche – that is new.²⁴ In German films, according to Kracauer, this combination is lacking: 'Wo man sich technisch gebärdet, dort wird man von geistigen Dingen nicht eben getroffen'.²⁵ He considers the strict division of man (the 'Geist' – exploration of human emotion and intellect) and the modern world ('Technik') in the 'Schwärmen' of American and European films to be untruthful.²⁶ This indicates that Kracauer, like Benjamin, deems it necessary to update the artwork in order best to represent the transformation of subjective experience as a result of technical modernity.

²² Belke, pp. 24–28.

²³ Ibid., p. 29.

²⁴ Siegfried Kracauer, 'Die Jupiterlampen brennen weiter: Zur Frankfurter Aufführung des Potemkin Films' (1926), in *KSF* 6.1, pp. 234–237.

²⁵ Kracauer, 'Die Jupiterlampen brennen weiter', p. 236.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 234.

Kracauer's endorsement of the narrative of *Battleship Potemkin* is particularly significant for the purpose of this chapter. For Kracauer, the conditions of production in Germany have made it impossible for German directors even to address such a subject, never mind delve deep enough to arrive at anything approximating a critical approach. This is not the case in Russia:

Etwas anderes trennt [dieser Film] von der Weltproduktion, etwas grundsätzlich anderes. Er hat die Wand durchstoßen, hinter die jene Filme nicht dringen. Er trifft eine Sache, die *wirklich* ist, er meint die Wahrheit, um die es zu gehen hat. [...] Der Instinkt der herrschenden Gesellschaftsklasse [...] untersagt in Europa sowohl wie in Amerika eine allzugrelle Belichtung der bedenklichen Tatsachen, die unser sogenanntes soziales Leben vorerst noch bedingen. [...] Dieser Film verdrängt nichts. Er läßt – ein Wunder – die Jupiterlampen fortleuchten über dem Kampf der Unterdrückten gegen die Unterdrücker.²⁷

Like Benjamin, Kracauer does not name the specific revolutionary forces in this initial praise for *Battleship Potemkin* here: it is the fight against oppression that he considers unique and commendable. He attributes the film's merit to the artistic freedom granted to the filmmakers to illuminate social conditions critically.

In his review of Eisenstein's *October: Ten Days That Shook The World* (1928), Kracauer is also impressed by the real people playing themselves, and notes: '[b]esonders großartig sind die wenigen Szenen, in denen die *Improvisation* verherrlicht wird'.²⁸ The lay actors in Pudovkin's *Storm Over Asia* earn his praise in a film that is also about revolt amongst the oppressed. Unlike in *Potemkin*, where the line between good and evil, poor and rich, was clear for Kracauer ('Die Lage ist so einfach, jedes Kind erfaßt, daß Recht gegen Unrecht steht'²⁹), this film offers more differentiated characterisation:

²⁷ Kracauer, 'Die Jupiterlampen brennen weiter', p. 234. Emphasis in original.

²⁸ Siegfried Kracauer, 'Der Eisenstein-Film' (1928), in *KSF* 6.2, pp. 85–88 (p. 87). Emphasis in original.

²⁹ Kracauer, 'Die Jupiterlampen brennen weiter', p. 235.

Statt die Pelzhändler zu Karikaturen zu verzerren, zeichnet er sie als dreidimensionale Menschen, die durch ihre Position zu Bedrückern werden, und erschließt aus kleinen Gesten ihre Verhärtung. Wunderbar ist die Armut des Volkes veranschaulicht.³⁰

Kracauer therefore identifies in this film the laying bare of the structural conditions or circumstances that lead to the division between oppressor and oppressed.

The ideals of the Russian Revolution films were adapted in films for German audiences to a limited extent. The brief emergence of a German ‘proletarian film’ genre in the Weimar Republic won a limited degree of favour amongst German leftist intellectual circles. Kracauer’s reception of the German proletarian film offers further insight into the kind of subject matter that he considers imperative for political and social change. *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* (1929) was marketed as ‘Der große Zille Film’³¹ and, like many films of the time, tapped into the popularity of the Berlin artist and champion of the proletariat, Heinrich Zille (1858-1929). For Kracauer, the merit of this film lies in the director Phil Jutzi’s combining of the communist subject matter with outstanding technical skill: ‘Seine Straßen-, Häuser- und Hofaufnahmen sind großartig, seine Übergänge sachlich begründet’.³² The content here is neither ‘dumm’ nor ‘verlogen’, but truthful; the associations created through montage are ‘sachlich’. Comparing Jutzi’s film to the Russian Revolution film *Earth*, Kracauer writes: ‘Um wie viel echter und revolutionärer wirken die demonstrierenden Arbeiter im deutschen Film: *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* [...] als diese Bauern’.³³ He is particularly enthused about the transformation of the family’s hopeless economic situation into a hopeful future through the workers’ demonstration; as Mother Krause runs out of options to escape her dire financial

³⁰ Siegfried Kracauer, ‘Sturm über Asien: Zu dem Film von Pudowkin’ (1929), in *KSF* 6.2, pp. 191–195 (p.194).

³¹ See advertising posters in Murray, pp. 211–212.

³² Siegfried Kracauer, ‘Wedding im Film’ (1930), in *KSF* 6.2, pp. 329–331 (p. 330).

³³ Siegfried Kracauer, ‘Die Filmprüfstelle gegen einen Russenfilm’ (1930), in *KSF* 6.2, pp. 384–387 (p. 386).

situation, the momentum of her daughter Erna's march produces the energy to carry the younger generation forward.

A second film to emerge from the same production company was Slátan Dudow's *Kuhle Wampe oder: Wem gehört die Welt?* (1931-32). Though this was made under the umbrella of Prometheus, it was made at a time when the company was failing due to economic crisis and the industry's transition to sound film. Dudow enlisted Bertolt Brecht and Ernst Ottwalt to write a script for a planned project to make a low-budget film, and the result represents an experiment in many ways. It was produced by Brecht, Dudow and the real-life Communist Fichte Sport Club, whose members feature in the film. Over four thousand people were involved in the making of *Kuhle Wampe*, realising many of the objectives of the new aesthetic paradigm developed by Brecht in his theatrical work.³⁴ Mass participation enabled the breakdown of the strict division between the masses and the producer – a division that *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* upheld – as well as an authentic portrayal of working-class conditions.

Kracauer's reaction to *Kuhle Wampe* was lukewarm. The film was banned by censors in April 1932, a matter that Kracauer discusses in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in a piece entitled “‘Kuhle Wampe’ verboten!”³⁵ Whilst he defends the film against censorship, dismissing each of the claims of the film censorship board in turn, he criticises the film's plot. He takes issue with the representation of the jobless petty bourgeoisie in contrast to the optimistic worker youth, arguing that the two portrayals are extreme to the point of caricature. For Kracauer, the pitting of one generation against the other does not effectively encapsulate the real struggle, nor is the depiction of sport as a revolutionary activity accurate. Though his perspective is critical, Kracauer is ultimately disappointed that Brecht and Ottwalt wasted the potential political freedom to be won from producing and filming outside of commercial production

³⁴ Bertolt Brecht, ‘The sound Film *Kuhle Wampe* or *Who Owns the World?*’ in *Bertolt Brecht on Film and Radio*, ed. and trans. by Marc Silberman (London: Methuen, 2000), pp. 204–206.

³⁵ Siegfried Kracauer, “‘Kuhle Wampe’ verboten!” (1932), in *KSF* 6.3, pp. 50–55.

structures: ‘Was ein Schlag gegen die offizielle Filmproduktion hätte sein können, ist ein Schlag ins Wasser geworden’.³⁶

Despite such contemporary criticism, the *Lexikon des internationalen Films* describes *Kuhle Wampe* as ‘Der einzige offen kommunistische Film der Weimarer Republik’,³⁷ a label that it earned not only because it addresses mass unemployment and economic crisis, but also perhaps because this was the only film to emerge from the period that was actually produced according to less hierarchical principles than other films of the time. The distinctiveness of the film for this reason is a point that Kracauer acknowledges,³⁸ but this also makes his disappointment so bitter. There is no written record that reveals Benjamin’s thoughts on Dudow’s and Brecht’s film, and in his *Kunstwerk* essay, which was written only three years after *Kuhle Wampe* was made, Benjamin continues to cite only Russian filmmaking as exemplary.³⁹ One explanation for Benjamin’s general lack of interest in German filmmaking may be the unchanging commercial conditions of production and distribution, which meant that he could not commend filmmaking due to its lack of *Tendenz*. For Benjamin, then, no political subject matter is valid without the corresponding changes to the mode of production within the framework of wider social transformation. Kracauer, on the other hand, continues to analyse the effectiveness of film within existing hegemonic structures.

To summarise, there are some clear differences in the two thinkers’ respective analyses of Russian film culture and its German counterpart. Benjamin is primarily interested in the political and cultural circumstances that permit the formation of collectives, both cinematic and literary. The conditions of production are as important for Benjamin as the subject matter: this positions him in the same school as Brecht in that both look to challenge radically

³⁶ Kracauer, “‘Kuhle Wampe’ verboten!”, p. 52.

³⁷ Katholisches Institut für Medieninformation (KIM) and the Katholische Filmkommission für Deutschland (eds), *Lexikon des Internationalen Films* (Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins, 2002), p. 1762.

³⁸ Kracauer, “‘Kuhle Wampe’ verboten!”, p. 50.

³⁹ Benjamin, ‘Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit’, p. 494.

the distinction between filmmaker/producer and the public by involving the ‘everyman’ and ‘everywoman’ in the filmmaking process. In this process of restructuring, the characters and storyline in a film are integral components. However, the broader political context in which he considers Russian film means that Benjamin never achieves the nuanced examination of character types, appreciation of technical competency and the close textual readings that Kracauer does. Kracauer sees the political potential of film in more cinematic terms; through the aesthetic and technical achievements of the directors that permit viewer identification with certain characters and the deconstruction of hegemonic power structures. The tension between their perspectives regarding the quality, effectiveness and objectives of a critically engaged cinema clearly reflects the different scholarly emphases of the two thinkers: Benjamin, the cultural Marxist, literary scholar and translator, and Kracauer, the Marxist-oriented cultural commentator whose later *Theory of Film* indicates a wholehearted belief in the uniqueness and particularity of the moving image.

Nevertheless, Benjamin and Kracauer both see that the political situation in Russia was a precondition for the critical cinematic output of revolutionary filmmakers such as Eisenstein and Pudovkin. By writing about the achievements of these directors, and making direct comparisons between Soviet and German cinema, both thinkers are looking to stimulate the activities of German filmmakers; not necessarily to revolutionary ends, but certainly in order to inspire the ‘*dialektische Auseinandersetzung mit der Wirklichkeit*’ that Kracauer considers far more pronounced in Russian than in German cultural output.⁴⁰ Their writings call for film to address different subject matter, most significantly the capitalist exploitation of the figure of the worker. Moreover, both agree that self-representation through the use of lay actors is a crucial step towards achieving equality, in the first instance by recognising their status as cultural

⁴⁰ Siegfried Kracauer, ‘Sind Menschenliebe, Gerechtigkeit und Duldsamkeit an eine bestimmte Staatsform geknüpft und welche Staatsform gibt die beste Gewähr für ihre Durchführung?’, quoted in Belke, p. 29.

producers. Before I consider the extent to which these different demands relating to content are relevant in contemporary film, I will briefly illustrate how Kluge's considerations of the worker in film provide a useful stepping-stone in this process.

ALEXANDER KLUGE AND THE REVIVAL OF THE *ARBEITERFILME* IN WEST GERMANY, 1968–1976

The proletarian film continued to live on after the end of the Second World War in different forms. In East Germany, where the Communist martyrs of the Weimar Republic and industrial heroes were celebrated, and the goal was a functioning socialist state, DEFA Film would appear the natural home of the tradition that had been truncated by National Socialism. However, it was West Germany that saw the production of films that are considered to be the rekindling of the proletarian film movement of the 1920s and early 1930s.⁴¹ The so-called *Arbeiterfilme* of West-Germany constitute a sub-category of New German Cinema in a movement that existed between 1968 and 1976.⁴² Though Kluge was not one of the directors directly involved in the *Westdeutsche Rundfunk Köln*-based *Arbeiterfilme*, his texts reveal some clear ideological parallels with those directors associated with the West German revival of the proletarian film genre. Collins and Porter observe that, although the political circumstances between the earlier and later 'waves' of proletarian films were specific to the time, a key commonality was 'the body of reflection and theory in Marxist aesthetics on the

⁴¹ Richard Collins and Vincent Porter, for example, link the two filmic movements and analyse the *Arbeiterfilme* against the backdrop of their Weimar predecessors. See 'Introduction' to *WDR and the Arbeiterfilm: Fassbinder, Ziewer and others* (London: bfi, 1981), pp. 1–6.

⁴² The brief spate of films included the documentary by Theo Gallehr and Rolf Schübel, *Rote Fahnen sieht man besser* (1971) about the closure of the Phrix chemical works in Krefeld; various fiction films by Ziewer and Klaus Wiese about the conflicts faced by shop floor workers with their management; and a five-part 'family soap opera' by Fassbinder called *Acht Stunden sind kein Tag* (1972).

relation of artistic representation to cognition and to social transformation, especially the work of Brecht, Ernst Bloch and Georg Lukács'.⁴³

Like Fassbinder and Ziewer, the two key figures of the WDR *Arbeiterfilm* movement, and indeed like Benjamin, Kluge advocates a Brechtian approach in his writings on film.⁴⁴ Moreover, this was a period when these and other leftist filmmakers who were influenced by the Frankfurt School sought to use public broadcasting channels, particularly television, as political instruments of change. In relation to the film *Acht Stunden sind kein Tag*, for example, Fassbinder spoke about the importance of first drawing an audience and the potential of reaching a wide audience using television: 'Von diesem Moment an kann man versuchen, politische Inhalte unterzubringen. So dass die Zuschauer möglicherweise auch bereit sind, mit den Figuren in die DKP [Deutsche Kommunistische Partei] einzutreten, um es mal ganz primitiv auszudrücken'.⁴⁵ For Ziewer, this meant ongoing collaborative projects between WDR and his production company Basis Film GmbH, while for Kluge it entailed the very criticism of public service television and the call for structural change.⁴⁶

The imperative of representing the experiences of the everyman and -woman using audiovisual media is one point of intersection between Benjamin, Kracauer, and Kluge. For Kluge and his periodic writing collaborator and former student of Adorno and Horkheimer, Oskar Negt, the reform of public media is part of a comprehensive social and political transformation that must take place through the realisation of an, as yet, barely existent proletarian public sphere, a counter-public (*Gegenöffentlichkeit*) to the dominant bourgeois public sphere. Kluge and Negt identify the mainstream media as a cog in this 'pseudo-public sphere':

⁴³ Collins and Porter, p. 67.

⁴⁴ For a detailed account of Ziewer's aesthetic influences, which include Italian neo-realism, British realism and Weimar proletarian cinema, see Collins and Porter, pp. 66–74. The influence of Brecht on Kluge – especially relating to montage and realism – can be identified throughout Kluge's texts on film, in particular 'Montage, Authentizität, Realismus' in Klaus Eder and Alexander Kluge, *Ulmer Dramaturgien: Reibungsverluste* (Munich: Hanser, 1980), pp. 97–101.

⁴⁵ Fassbinder quoted in Collins and Porter, p. 52.

⁴⁶ See Chapter 3 in Negt and Kluge, pp. 169–224.

they claim to represent the majority, yet exclude anything that goes against the grain for fear of undermining their legitimacy. The thinkers' argument is rehearsed in their monograph *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung*,⁴⁷ which was published in 1972, the year in which WDR *Arbeiterfilm* production was at its peak. Negt and Kluge build on Habermas' analysis of the development of democracy in *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*,⁴⁸ and look to fill in the gaps, specifically with regard to the working classes. In *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung*, the authors present a critique of exclusionist strategies in the bourgeois public sphere and a call for the redefinition of what constitutes the 'public' that cuts across different historical, social and cultural axes. It is not necessary to analyse this complex text here in order to present Kluge's arguments relating to the media as a whole, since it pays little attention to film, and other scholars have done this effectively.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, it is possible to distil some key points regarding media – especially filmic – content that are relevant to this chapter.

Negt and Kluge argue that the working classes remain underrepresented in public broadcasting. They use the word 'proletarisch' throughout *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung* in order to illustrate that circumstances have changed so little over the past century that the term remains relevant:

Das Wort proletarisch hat in der Bundesrepublik eine verengte, ja anachronistische Bedeutung erhalten. Die wirklichen Verhältnisse, die es bezeichnet, sind aber gegenwärtig und besitzen keinen anderen Ausdruck. Wir sind der Auffassung, daß es ein falsches Verhältnis zur Sprache ist, das die Worte schneller veralten läßt, als sich die Gegenstände verändern, die von den Worten benannt werden.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Negt and Kluge.

⁴⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Berlin: Neuwied, 1962). See 'Vorrede', in Negt and Kluge, esp. p. 8 note 1.

⁴⁹ See e.g. Tara Forrest (ed.), *Raw Materials for the Imagination* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012).

⁵⁰ Negt and Kluge, p. 9.

The proletarian public sphere is conceived as an oppositional, political space that challenges the pseudo-public sphere, or bourgeois public sphere.⁵¹ Like Benjamin, Kluge and Negt adopt a radical position with regards to the (in)efficacy of anti-hegemonic media within political systems that serve to protect the interests of those in power. Challenging the topics covered by public broadcasting channels and other audiovisual media is just one of a number of different components of the necessary social transformation. As Hansen comments in the introduction to the English translation of the book, their use of the Marxist term ‘proletarian’ may be read, on the one hand, as ‘quaint’ or ‘nostalgic’:⁵²

Yet it may also be that their self-conscious revival of an “anachronistic” concept allowed them to theorize something qualitatively new under the mask of the old, to register major changes in the public sphere that were barely visible on the horizon.⁵³

Though they stop using the term ‘proletarian’ as a component of the counter public sphere in subsequent texts, here it serves as a red flag.

In concrete terms, Kluge encourages filmmakers to work together with non-filmmakers in order to facilitate a public articulation of experience. He writes about his own attempt to record the forced eviction of the inhabitants of an apartment building in Frankfurt am Main on film, an experience that Kluge considers ‘public’. However, the inhabitants refuse to let Kluge film them because they believe it to be their struggle alone. Kluge’s response is as follows: ‘ihr könnt doch kein Privateigentum an euren Kämpfen errichten, so wie der Unternehmer ein Privateigentum an seiner Fabrik errichtet und uns durch den Werkschutz

⁵¹ Miriam Hansen shows how Negt and Kluge employ the term ‘proletarian’ in its Neo-Marxist sense, which is not related solely to the working classes, but to other marginalised groups. See ‘Foreword’, in Negt and Kluge, pp. ix–xli.

⁵² Hansen, ‘Foreword’, p. xvi.

⁵³ Ibid., p. xvi.

daran hindern würde, etwas aufzunehmen'.⁵⁴ He argues that such experiences must be represented so as not to reinforce the structures of exclusion that define the 'hegemonic non-public sphere', and claims that his job as a filmmaker is precisely this act of representation:

Wenn wir einen Film über Bauern machen würden, so wäre es dasselbe: wir sind keine Bauern, und selbst wenn wir uns ein halbes Jahr so verhalten würden, als wären wir Bauern, sind wir keine. Dadurch, daß wir in Betrieben arbeiten, werden wir keine Arbeiter. Wir wissen zu jedem Zeitpunkt, daß wir einen anderen Beruf haben und weggehen können. Öffentlichkeit kann nur professionell hergestellt werden, indem man die Abstraktion annimmt, die darin liegt, daß man eine Information zu einer anderen Stelle in der Gesellschaft trägt, daß man Verbindungslinien legt.⁵⁵

This passage suggests that Kluge upholds the notion of a professional artist who is entrusted with the task of collaborating with the worker. Whilst Kluge's filmmaking activities do not make him part of the fleeting WDR *Arbeiterfilm* movement, he, like Benjamin and Kracauer, considers the representation – and where possible the self-representation – of the proletariat to be of utmost importance for filmmakers.

Thus the two indispensable thematic strands advocated by all three theorists – a critique of capitalism through the figure of the worker and the depiction of characters in a working-class milieu – are found to varying degrees in the Weimar Republic proletarian film movement and the West German WDR *Arbeiterfilm* movements. These two short-lived variations on a genre can both be traced back to revolutionary Russia and the fight for representation both within and outside of hegemonic production and distribution structures. Furthermore, with clear Marxist origins and influences, both the Weimar and West German variations are characterised by the filmmakers' conviction that the worker should embody him- or herself on-screen and by the ideal of a democratic artistic process. The working-class

⁵⁴ Eder and Kluge, p. 57.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 57–58.

milieu is presented as a site of authentic experience in contrast to bourgeois, capitalist spheres, and the goal is ultimately to stimulate a specifically leftist political consciousness in the viewer. Therefore, it is not merely the addressing of a particular subject or the focus on a working-class milieu that distinguishes the films of these movements: it is also the mode of production and a concern for authentic representations. With these principles in mind, the following section looks at two contemporary German-language films and considers the extent to which they correspond to these ideals.

THE TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY WORKER FILM

One documentary film that specifically addresses the subject of the worker in relation to the prevailing economic and political system is *Workingman's Death* (2004). This film, directed by Michael Glawogger, who is often considered alongside Erwin Wagonhofer and Nicolas Geyrhalter as an anti-globalisation documentary filmmaker,⁵⁶ will be the first of my two case studies. I will compare this documentary to a feature film that depicts characters in a working-class milieu, Elke Hauck's *Karger* (2007) and thus corresponds to the second decisive narrative strand specified by Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge.

The anti-globalisation documentary film genre is an offshoot of the documentary film genre; it scrutinises labour, production and migration from different perspectives. The German and Austrian output in this subgenre, mainly made for television audiences with limited cinema release, has been quite significant over the past decade. Ulrike Franke and Michael Loeken's *Losers and Winners* from 2006 is one such example: the WDR/Arte and Goethe Institute production documents the dismantling of an eight-year old coking factory in Kaiserstuhl by Chinese workers for a Chinese company that plans to re-build the factory in

⁵⁶ Ralph Eue, 'Brot und Stahl', *film-dienst*, 59 (2006), 11–13 (p. 12).

China. The €650 million plant has been rendered redundant after only eight years of service by cheap coke sourcing from outside Germany; Franke and Loeken thus set up an opposition between the significant step of technological modernisation that the building of the plant represents for the Chinese industrialists – and the optimism that this brings – and the gloom of the few remaining German employees left in the huge plant to oversee its dismantling. The director-editor duo also made *Arbeit Heimat Opel* (2012), a documentary that follows a set of apprentices beginning their careers in the Opel factory in Bochum. Austrian filmmakers Erwin Wagenhofer (*We Feed the World*, 2005, *Let's Make Money*, 2008) and Nikolaus Geyrhalter (*Our Daily Bread*, 2005, *Abendland*, 2011) may also be considered in the ‘anti-globalisation documentary’ tradition. Both *Unser täglich Brot* and *We Feed the World* take as their subject the food on supermarket shelves and the journey it has made from its source. Like Volker Sattel’s *Unter Kontrolle* (2011), these films also rely on few words and long takes to prompt the viewer’s translation of the images into a comment on the modern mass production methods employed to meet consumer demand. These films use a range of formats and styles within the documentary genre in order to present viewers with a critique of capitalism – a necessary feature of the worker film according to Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge.

Elke Hauck is certainly not the only contemporary German director to make films in which the majority of the protagonists are blue-collar workers or people with a low income. Andreas Dresen is perhaps the best-known and most commercially successful filmmaker to do so; the documentary-like aesthetic and improvised dialogue in many of his feature films indicate a commitment to authenticity (which will be elaborated in Chapter Three), and Dresen has spoken about how he counts among his influences 1970s Soviet cinema that is ‘close to the ground of real, common people’.⁵⁷ Other films featuring blue-collar workers

⁵⁷ Marco Abel, “‘There is no Authenticity in the Cinema!’: An Interview with Andreas Dresen” in *senses of cinema*, 50 (2009), <<http://sensesofcinema.com/2009/50/andreas-dresen-interview/#6>> [accessed May 2014].

include Barbara Albert's *Nordrand* (1999), Christian Petzold's *Jerichow* (2008), and Ulrich Seidl's *Import/Export* (2007). However, *Karger* offers a productive counterpoint to *Workingman's Death* for several reasons: both films focus specifically on work and the figure of the worker, and both directors have stated that they were driven by a desire to 'show respect' to the fictional/non-fictional workers they portray in making the films.⁵⁸ Furthermore, the two formally divergent takes of the twenty-first-century worker film offer modes of self-representation that in part differ from those employed in previous waves of worker films, but which illustrate a continuation of the tension between form and content.

THE ARTIST'S GAZE IN MICHAEL GLAWOGGER'S *WORKINGMAN'S DEATH*

Michael Glawogger (1959-2014) was born in Graz and studied at San Francisco Art Institute before completing a degree at the *Filmakademie Wien*. He worked as a freelance director, writer and cameraman in Vienna, and *Workingman's Death* is his third and most successful documentary film. He also enjoyed relative success with his feature films, the first of which, *Die Ameisenstrasse*, was Austria's entry for best foreign film at the Academy Awards in 1995. His last feature film, *Slumming*, premiered at the Berlin Film Festival in 2006. The mixture of documentary, feature, and so-called docudramas in the director's portfolio is less indicative of his refusal to 'settle' on a genre than it is of the necessity of categorisation for festival entry: in all of his documentaries, for example, he combines a real subject matter and people playing themselves with the kind of staging and attention to light, sound and framing that is usually associated with feature films.

Workingman's Death opens with a montage of moving images from the 1920s and 1930s, an homage to the 'worker films' of the past. A man and a woman stand, fists raised, and in

⁵⁸ Eue, p. 12, and author interview with Elke Hauck, December 2013.

turn proclaim in Russian, ‘I, the best worker from Shaft 9, do solemnly declare, I will have extracted 28,000 tons above average by the end of the year’.⁵⁹ There follow five twenty-minute portraits of hard physical labour from all over the world: coal miners in Ukraine, sulphur miners in Indonesia, young men working in an open abattoir and meat market in Nigeria, shipyard workers in Pakistan and workers at a steel plant in China. The documentary shows the arduous, at times dangerous, cyclical work of predominantly male labourers in these places; none exhibit the pride or glory of the Soviet workers in the prologue. By way of an epilogue, the film closes with a short series of sequences filmed at a steel plant-turned-visitors’ park in Duisburg, Germany. It shows young people socialising on the site over the course of an afternoon and evening.

The film is certainly set up as successor to the proletarian and *Arbeiterfilme*, as Michael Glawogger pledges to present us with ‘5 Bilder zur Arbeit im 21. Jahrhundert’, to quote the film’s subtitle. The documentary footage in the prologue is taken from a post-revolutionary Soviet Union, in a historical moment when the workers were the backbone of the new Communist regime and had been given the title of ‘new people’ by Stalin in his address at the All-Union Stakhanovite Conference in November 1935.⁶⁰ In the book of texts and photographs accompanying the film, Glawogger writes the following about the first of the ‘Bilder’, which examines anthracite coal miners in present-day Donbass, Ukraine:

Wir sind in die Ukraine gekommen und waren dem Abbild des heroischen Arbeiters auf der Spur – den Heldenbildern der Vergangenheit. Die Gegenwart hat uns überrascht. Der Niedergang, die Schließungen – und das Elend, das für die Bergarbeiter im Donbass daraus folgt.⁶¹

⁵⁹ All quotations from the film refer to *Workingman’s Death*, dir. by Michael Glawogger (ÖFI Edition der Standard, 2004).

⁶⁰ Michael Glawogger, ‘Der Neue Mensch’ in Michael Glawogger, *Workingman’s Death. Bilder & Texte zur Arbeit im 21. Jahrhundert* (Vienna: Mandelbaum, 2006), p. 97.

⁶¹ Glawogger, ‘Der Neue Mensch’, p. 241.

Impressions and monuments celebrating the former worker heroes of the region – embodied in the legend of Alexei Stakhanov, who, on one historic night in August 1935, mined 102 tonnes of coal in one shift – are woven into the bleak images of the Ukrainian men entering treacherous 40-cm-tall mine shafts 80 years later, in order to extract coal illegally to heat their homes and the local schools. This contrast allows Glawogger to introduce a key narrative strand that runs throughout the film: a commitment – perhaps moral in nature – to represent the plight of the worker, the forgotten hero of the twenty-first century. In one interview for the film that Glawogger gave for the journal *film-dienst*, he comments that attitudes towards workers have changed in the West, noting that strikers are no longer considered to be legitimate, but rather ‘Querulanten’, and says, ‘Die Arbeiterschaft [ist] der große Verlierer der letzten hundert Jahre’.⁶² He goes on to say,

Mir ging es in *Workingman’s Death* in erster Linie darum, die Dauer und Mühsal der Arbeit sichtbar zu machen, ihr auch durch die Art der Darstellung und die Wahl der Technik – wir haben mit Super 16 gedreht – Respekt zu erweisen. Kein Miserabilismus. Ich wollte sie in ihrem Stolz zeigen.⁶³

The extent to which the workers appear to be victims of exploitation in the film differs according to their work and their location, yet it is possible to identify an overarching anti-globalisation narrative, which in some instances may be read as a critique of capitalism. Unlike in the proletarian films and the *Arbeiterfilme* of the past, however, no tangible culprit or display of hegemonic power is shown in the film. For example, the film shows how the inhabitants of entire regions of Ukraine have been left unemployed by the closure of mines, leaving towns and villages with no alternative jobs or means of survival. By intercutting the old footage with the new and showing the desperation of these workers and their families in contrast to a time

⁶² Eue, p. 11.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 12.

when work was abundant and the region was booming, the film creates clear-cut binaries between then and now, abundance and poverty, state-controlled and free-market economies. Nevertheless, the miners at no point attribute the blame explicitly to any individual or government: the agents of their situation are conspicuously absent. In the part of the film that is filmed in a Pakistani ship-breaking yard, the workers are presented as victims of uncontrollable change, too. Though the title ('Brüder') of this section and its subject matter may evoke the 1929 film of the same name that portrays the 1896 dockworkers' strike in Hamburg,⁶⁴ the Pashtun workers in Pakistan are in no position to protest for better conditions, more reliable jobs or steady payment. One worker says, 'You only get to work here if you agree to anything. There's no way out'. Their task is to break down the huge ships that arrive at the dock into manageable pieces of metal, which are then piled up on the edge of the yard for collection. The only mention of a broader context to their activity comes at the start of the section in a song in which one of the Pashtun sings about how he misses home: 'I have written to the English and asked that them not to send any more ships, so that I can come to be with you'. This causal link between the British government and the work on the shipyard in the song illustrate this worker's inability to recognise the local and national structures that have a bearing on his situation.

Though the poor conditions of workers all over the world are foregrounded thematically, none of the sections offers any prospects for change, nor does any of them depict the oppressive power structures in the respective societies. The capitalism that is critiqued is faceless, rendering the worker effectively impotent as there is no government or system against which he can revolt: it is left for the viewer to speculate as to the various political and economic transformations that have led to these workers performing these activities. It does not appear, then, that Glawogger is looking to portray the eponymous 'working man' as a

⁶⁴ *Brüder*, dir. by Werner Hochbaum (1929).

political figure in the film. Unlike in the proletarian films of the Weimar Republic and the *Arbeiterfilme* of West Germany, the workers in *Workingman's Death* do not appear as structured but rather as isolated individuals who have little agency or awareness as to how to change their conditions. Their lack of oversight is underscored by the fragmented structure of the film, a point to which I return below.

Moreover, for Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge, the purpose of depicting workers with political agency – be it mutiny on *Battleship Potemkin* or unionisation in Fassbinder's *Acht Stunden sind keinen Tag* – is to activate the viewers. The question then becomes one of audience. In other words, if Glawogger is looking to make the workers' endurance and hardship in the film 'visible' ('Mir ging es in 'Workingman's Death' [...] darum, die Dauer und Mühsal der Arbeit sichtbar zu machen'⁶⁵), it is worth asking: 'visible' to whom and for whose benefit? In the proletarian films of the Weimar Republic and West Germany, the audience was the German 'everyman' and 'everywoman', and the goal was to encourage working-class engagement in political processes in and outside of the working environment. It was assumed that subject and spectator were one and the same: the films were targeted at the people they claimed to represent. In *Workingman's Death*, however, the working subject is not located in Germany or Austria. The national borders that delineated the relationship between filmmaker and subject in earlier worker films have shifted: Glawogger frames the struggle of the worker globally rather than locally as he juxtaposes snapshots of manual labourers from different parts of the world. This does not appear to be an attempt to represent visually an international workers' community, however, nor to create a sense of solidarity between the different human cogs of global production machines. The individual segments remain disparate, separated by black frames and intertitles, and so the 'Verlierer' appear trapped in their twenty-minute sections. Viewers are presented with a momentary glimpse of an isolated element in a chain of processes

⁶⁵ Eue, p. 12.

that seems cyclical and infinite. Furthermore, given that this Austro-German co-production was not distributed in any of the countries where the images of manual labour were filmed,⁶⁶ it is evident that those watching the film are unlikely to recognise themselves in the workers.

Thus the question arises as to whether this gap between the worker depicted and the viewer is irreconcilable. Does it necessarily disqualify *Workingman's Death* from the worker film genre, or does it merely reflect economic shifts on a global scale? Perhaps the German-language worker film of the twenty-first century engages with the exploitation of workers *outside* of Germany or Austria and promotes an anti-globalisation message in this way. As I show below, however, there are some further reasons to question whether Glawogger's film could qualify as a worker's film for contemporary audiences.

Whilst the economic and cultural gap between the majority of the film's viewers and the workers on-screen is one way that *Workingman's Death* differs from the worker films of the past, the gap between the workers and the filmmaker is another. The model of the democratised artwork, as striven for by Brecht and Ziewer, for example, is not evident in this worker film. In neo-Marxist terms, both Benjamin and Kluge argue that the artist must collaborate with the worker in order to facilitate his or her self-representation using various strategies, one of which is the use of real people and documentary methods. Though the workers in *Workingman's Death* are 'playing' themselves, Glawogger maintains a strict division between himself as artist-intellectual and the workers he films. Indeed, Glawogger has stated, 'I do what you might call "artistic documentaries". They're a form of art. It has nothing to do with journalism or any kind of objectivity or any kind of realism'.⁶⁷

There are two sections that exemplify Glawogger's privileging of the 'artistic' over the

⁶⁶ The film went on general release in Austria, Germany, Italy, Spain, Luxemburg, Poland and Switzerland in 2006 only. <http://www.workingmansdeath.at/news_en.html> [accessed October 2013].

⁶⁷ Cynthia Lucia, "'Some Friends You Have!': An Interview with Michael Glawogger", *Cineaste*, 38 (2012), 28–41 (p. 34).

‘documentary’, which I suggest serves to sharpen the power divide between filmmaker and subject. In the central episode of the film, ‘Löwen’, the images of goats and bulls being brought to the ground, slaughtered, skinned, dismembered and roasted in the huge open abattoir in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, are presented for our viewing gratification. The animals’ unoxidised blood is neon red; the workers navigate the narrow streets with large animal parts on their backs in a skilful dance; the smoke lends a dusky, eerie atmosphere to the segment. The men are deified, transformed into angels with wings made of carcasses in the midst of the surrounding death (Fig. 1). There is a didactic sense in the way that Glawogger films each of the stages, from the buyer bargaining for the part of the animal and the price she will pay, all the way to the portions of meat finding their way into the back of cars at the edge of the abattoir. On the commentary to this section Glawogger says, ‘I think these images can change our perspective on what kind of creatures we are. What we do, how we live, how we eat’.⁶⁸

Glawogger’s relationship with his subjects, then, is complex: on the one hand, his gaze illuminates poor working conditions and processes in different parts of the world, and in so doing, it appears that he wishes to enlighten Western viewers. On the other hand, his role is that of the artist in a more traditional sense: the ethics of filming scenes of violence against animals are second to the pursuit of beauty. Indeed, Glawogger firmly positions himself as an artist, above all, commenting in one interview on the abattoir scenes: ‘Nigeria is beautiful—it’s beautiful like an art installation. And, at the same time, it’s killing—so how can killing be beautiful? It is this little line that makes it worth showing. This is what film can do—it can pose emotional questions that you cannot solve’.⁶⁹ These dialectical elements of his work are embodied in the director’s self-designation as an ‘artistic documentary filmmaker’. This term represents a clear delineation between artist and subject and thereby does not suggest the democratisation of the artwork, nor the self-representation of the subject, in contrast to the

⁶⁸ Michael Glawogger, commentary to *Workingman’s Death*.

⁶⁹ Lucia, p. 32

worker films of the twentieth century.

This point is further illustrated in the section filmed in Indonesia entitled ‘Geister’. Here, we see male sulphur miners hiking up the Kawah Ljen volcano to retrieve hardened sulphur, and their journey back down carrying a total of between 70 and 115kg of sulphur on their backs. The labourers have become renowned for their physical exertion and often run into tourists on their path who buy pieces of sulphur from them, or pay to take a photograph. A steadycam follows the trail of miners, capturing the gentle bounce in their step in order to balance the load across their shoulders, and the special muscles they develop on their backs in so doing. When considered in the tradition of the worker film, this focus on the workers’ physiognomy and their Sisyphean journey has various effects, as with the section in Nigeria. The Indonesian workers are, in this case, elevated to the former glory of the comrades at the start of *Workingman’s Death*, and Glawogger successfully fulfils his goal of rendering visible the duration and the laboriousness of the work. The camera homes in on the body in a way that alludes to Marx’s comments in *Das Kapital* (1867) about the transformation of the labourer’s body when it becomes part of a manufacturing mechanism. Though I do not wish to undertake a Marxist analysis of the film, a brief reference to the section in *Band 1*, ‘Teilung der Arbeit und Manufaktur’, is helpful in elaborating how this visual focus on the workers’ physiognomy may contribute to a critique of capitalism. Anticipating the effect of Fordism on the body, Marx claims that performing the same task over and over again may result in an ‘einseitige Muskelentwicklung, Knochenverkrümmung usw’.⁷⁰ He writes,

[Die Manufaktur] verkrüppelt den Arbeiter in eine Abnormität, indem sie sein Detailgeschick treibhausmäßig fördert durch Unterdrückung einer Welt von produktiven Trieben und Anlagen, wie man in den La Plata Staaten ein ganzes Thier abschlachtet, um sein Fell oder seinen Talg zu erbeuten. Die besondern Theilarbeiten werden nicht nur unter verschiedene Individuen *vertheilt*, sondern das

⁷⁰ Karl Marx, *Das Kapital: Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie. 1. Band* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1983), p. 284 footnote 46.

Individuum selbst wird geteilt, in das automatische Triebwerk einer Theilarbeit verwandelt und die abgeschmackte Fabel des Menenius Agrippa verwirklicht, die einen Menschen als bloßes Fragment seines eignen Körpers darstellt.⁷¹

We might ask to what extent the beauty of the images invalidates this critique. For it is not crippled monstrosities with which we are presented; indeed this focus on the worker's body verges on fetishisation – the breathtaking impression of the volcano and strong, muscular workers' bodies are presented to the viewer for his or her visual consumption (Fig. 2). I suggest that Glawogger's lens is rather akin to those of the passing tourists, suggestive of a problematic – perhaps orientalist – dynamic between East and West, worker and filmmaker. Moreover, the fact that Glawogger pays some of his subjects for appearing in his films merely reinforces the non-democratic nature of the filming process and underscores that the workers' value is primarily economic. Whilst Glawogger's drawing attention to worker exploitation through the body may be a nod towards Marx, his aesthetic approach bears no trace of the collaborative, democratic ideal as expressed by Benjamin and Kluge. He does not strive to work with the workers, and benefits from the unequal power dynamic between himself and his subjects.

The last section of the film is set in modern-day Duisburg, and is perhaps the most illuminating episode when reading *Workingman's Death* in the tradition of the worker film. The six-minute section shows young people – boys and girls – playing at the *Landschaftspark* in Duisburg, a former steel plant that has been turned into a park and light installation. It is the only part of the film that features Germany, and the message is clear: here, camp fires have superseded the furnaces and hard labour is a thing of the past, a distant memory to which the younger generation have no direct access. The different coloured beams rose-tint the old factory, a visual metaphor for Glawogger's lament for the lost honour of the worker, of authentic, real labour in the West (Fig. 3).

⁷¹ Marx, p. 295.

Workingman's Death, then, suggests that there remains a certain need for worker representation, but that these workers exist outside Germany and Austria. Despite the director's denial of an ethical agenda,⁷² an anti-hegemonic thread runs through the film: the short, cyclical episodes effectively convey the hopelessness and desperation of the workers' situations whilst functioning as a critique of a Fordist breakdown of labour. In terms of subject matter, *Workingman's Death* offers one variation of a contemporary worker film. In an age when the level of economic inequality in places such as Pakistan and rural Ukraine seems to render political efficacy impossible, Glawogger raises some key questions concerning the figure of the worker in the twenty-first century. Is he suggesting that political consciousness should be raised in a Western European audience as it holds the power to create change, for example? With regards to his practices, we might ask: is the twenty-first-century worker film one that upholds the distinction between artist and worker, or is the anti-globalisation sentiment tempered with the camera's orientalist gaze?

COLLABORATING WITH THE WORKERS IN *KARGER*?

Though *Karger* picks up where *Workingman's Death* left off – in a steel plant in Germany – the film offers a very different worker film model and a valuable point of contrast to Glawogger's artistic documentary. Winner of the prize awarded by the Saarland Ministerpräsident at the Max Ophüls Film Festival in 2007, *Karger* was Elke Hauck's first feature film after graduating from the Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin (dffb). In the following section, I will show how some of the gaps I described in *Workingman's Death* – between audience and subject, and filmmaker and subject – are reconciled in *Karger*, and explore how the film represents the working-class milieu as an authentic site of experience.

⁷² Lucia, p. 34.

Karger is the name of the film's protagonist, a thirty-something steel worker in the Saxony town of Riesa. A softly spoken, bearish man with a back covered in tattoos and a uniform of jeans and a denim jacket, Karger (Jens Klemig) is a likeable, melancholic character. The story begins with a flashback to the moment when he met his wife, Sabine (Marion Kuhnt), in a bar and picks up again in a court some years later as his divorce from Sabine is finalised. Various personal and professional crises act as narrative markers in the film, yet neither his divorce nor his redundancy pull Karger out of his state of stagnation. He continues to seek affection from his ex-wife; he keeps his key and enters Sabine's house to see his daughter, Clara, becoming indignant at her accusation that he has crossed a boundary; he closes his ears to the news regarding the factory's future cutbacks by walking out of the meeting held by the new French management; he pursues a relationship with Ulrike (Anja Dietrich), the new barwoman of his local *Eckkneipe*, and immediately finds himself playing a father role to her children, this time with a different family but the same routines. With his head buried in the sand, Karger is unyielding in his refusal to adapt. It is only in the very last scene of the film that we see him take action and set off for Holland with the promise of work and a new life.

A central narrative thread throughout the film is work and the figure of the worker. Unlike in *Workingman's Death*, the working men in *Karger* are firmly positioned in post-reunification Germany. Whereas the brightly lit steel factory in the epilogue of *Workingman's Death* had become a site of leisure and symbol of times past, the steelwork in Riesa – Karger's place of work – is still functional. The first shot of the film following the title is reminiscent of the Chinese steel workers in *Workingman's Death*: the long shot of the factory interior from above reveals the impressive dimensions of the dark space that is permeated by light shafts, white-lit steam and contained fires (Fig. 4). The images of glowing red-hot steel cylinders traversing from process to process, overseen and aided by a group of men in hard hats and

overalls, establish the pipe constructor's place of work as industrial, loud, dirty, and exclusively male.

The camaraderie between the workers is a key component of the representation of work in *Karger*: we see the men showering together, bantering back and forth in the locker room, and offering each other support outside of work, too. These are not young workers, but rather middle-aged men, like Karger, or men nearing retirement. They are men who may have begun their careers here, and who will be some of the last to leave. We see the factory manager, an old school friend of Karger's, explaining to the employees how the past ten years saw the number of employees fall from 3,000 to 380 and, though we do not see or hear the reason why Karger and his fellow workers are made redundant, we can assume that it is linked to the purchase of the factory by a French company.

Thus the working men in *Karger* are in a period of transition. Though the characters and storyline are fictional, the film taps into the real situation faced by predominantly male workers in 'new' federal states following the closure and privatisation of state-owned assets by the *Treuhandanstalt*. Director Elke Hauck grew up in the northern Saxony town in which the story is based, and has spoken about the economic – and consequently demographic – changes that the city has seen over the past forty years. Riesa was an industrial city in the 1980s, with over 55,000 inhabitants, 'wie eine englische Industriestadt wie man sie aus englischen Filmen kennt'.⁷³ In 2006, when filming began, there were only 35,000 people living there and very few of the factories were still in commission. Hauck developed her idea for a film following a trip home for a school reunion where she sat next to a group of Karger-like men – an experience represented in the film from the perspective of one of these men.⁷⁴ Hauck says of her decision to film the world and experience of work in Riesa:

⁷³ Author interview with Elke Hauck, December 2013.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Die Stahlindustrie in der Stadt – diese Art von Arbeit – gefiel mir einfach unheimlich, weil sie immer weniger so stattfinden wird. Es gibt immer weniger Orte wo eine solche physische Arbeit verrichtet wird... also im Prinzip machen die Männer ja die Arbeit nicht körperlich selber; sie gucken zu, dann müssen sie schnell reagieren, aber trotzdem ist es eine klassische Männerarbeit, die zunehmend verschwindet.⁷⁵

Like Glawogger, then, Hauck laments the fading of this kind of work. Whereas Germany's transition from an industrial to a post-industrial state is presented as a *fait accompli* in *Workingman's Death*, *Karger* suggests that work in East Germany and the fate of the East German worker are topics that are not yet redundant, and that there is scope for a German worker film in 2007 that looks at manual labour in a national context.

The post-millennial worker is characterised in a number of other ways in this film. Like in *Workingman's Death*, the figure of the worker in *Karger* is a victim of the prevailing political and economic system, and a hero of former times. Both films refer to a socialist ideal of the past – the Soviet Union in the montage at the start of *Workingman's Death*, and the camaraderie and job security of the GDR in *Karger* – in order to present the West as a place where the manual labourer is no longer valued. For the film's protagonist, his work in the steel factory provides stability, an environment in which he belongs and one where he finds support as he goes through his divorce. After his redundancy, we see Karger and two of his former colleagues attempting to grapple with the job search function on a computer at the job centre. Karger's lackadaisical attitude towards the challenges he faces is made clear by the juxtaposition of this scene with the next, a shot of him waking up, fully clothed, on his sofa with his jacket covering his face, which suggests that he did not emerge from that experience with new job prospects. Our protagonist appears lost as he wanders down to the bank of the Elbe river and watches hundreds of frozen clumps of snow drift past on the water's surface (Fig. 5). The scene is an effective visual metaphor for Karger's relation to his environment,

⁷⁵ Author interview with Elke Hauck, December 2013.

which is moving forwards, progressing, changing state, as he remains rooted in the same position, dressed in the same denim outfit he has worn for the previous twenty years or so.

This lack of direction is underscored at his interview at the job centre, where the job centre employee asks what Karger's preferred kind of work is, to which he replies, 'Naja, alles'. His subsequent job as a travelling salesman for car cleaning fluid makes his dislocated condition even more apparent. Whilst admitting that the scene is somewhat 'überzogen', Hauck says:

Ich wollte aber, dass man kapiert, dass es absurd ist, dass er jetzt so alleine ist. Die Brigade in dem Stahlwerk war eine Gemeinschaft wie eine Schulklasse und jetzt ist er plötzlich alleine und muss mit dem Auto alleine rumfahren. Es ist eine Absurdität und ich habe mich immer gefragt, ob sich denn wirklich alle so wandeln können? Es ist einfach die Zeit, aber es ist irgendwas darin was eigentlich sehr hart ist, finde ich.⁷⁶

Whilst Hauck highlights the transition from collective to individual here, we may also read this temporary job as indicative of a perceived shift from 'authentic' to 'superficial' labour: when selling the cleaning fluids, Karger temporarily re-enters a space of 'real' work, a garage, which resembles the social environment of the factory. Rather than engaging in the tactile work of forming and shaping metal pipes, Karger's role is now accessorial, fluid, and transitory.

This is not the last stop on Karger's journey, however. The final scene of the film sees Karger pack a hold-all, bid farewell to Sabine, Clara, and Sabine's new partner, and join a group of men in a white van with 'Worker Personalleasing Agentur GmbH' written on the side. As they set off on the 12-hour journey to Holland, Karger is framed between two men who banter back and forth. He remains still, looking out of the window, and the only non-diegetic music on the film's soundtrack – the sound of drums beating – begins to play. Putting on his sunglasses, he continues to look out of the window and the camera pans away from

⁷⁶ Author interview with Elke Hauck, December 2013.

Karger to the grey skyline of Riesa's 1960s apartment blocks. The beating of the drums intensifies, and we are left to contemplate what kind of life awaits Karger in his new role as a German migrant worker in Holland. The German manual labourer in this twenty-first-century worker film, then, is one who is in the midst of departure.

By presenting audiences with a German worker to whom audiences in the new federal states may relate, Hauck certainly closes the stark gap between audience and viewer that I described in *Workingman's Death*. If we briefly consider the political reasons why the closing of this gap is significant for Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge, however, a parallel emerges between this film and Glawogger's artistic documentary. The aim of presenting viewers with characters with whom they could identify in the proletarian and *Arbeiterfilme* of the past was clear: to convey the imperative of (leftist) political action in a relatable way. For example, Kracauer praises Phil Jutzi's workers in *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* for their revolutionary spirit precisely because he hoped that this spirit would inspire and transform the viewer. Though cinemagoers may relate to the characters in *Karger*, the workers in the film appear neither politicised nor unionised. Socialism has been defeated by bigger economic forces, and Karger's job loss seems inevitable, rendering any form of revolution impossible: while the exploitative powers are not completely absent as they are in *Workingman's Death*, the agents of change in *Karger* – the French spokesperson, and Karger's boss and former classmate – are presented as the front men of a more powerful entity that is pulling the strings. That one of these decision-makers has an identical background to Karger's implies that the dire industrial situation applies to all cogs of the machine, not just to the smallest ones, the workers, and that a historical shift is taking place. We might then say that the transformations that both films seek to document should be understood as a critique not of capitalism in general, but the capitalism of the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries that is facilitated and accelerated by

globalisation. Using different formal approaches, each director puts a face to what Deleuze refers to as ‘a capitalism of higher-order production’ (capitalisme de surproduction):

In the present situation, capitalism is no longer involved in production, which it often relegates to the Third World, even for the complex forms of textiles, metallurgy, or oil production. [...] It no longer buys raw materials and no longer sells the finished products: it buys the finished products or assembles parts. What it wants to sell is services and what it wants to buy is stocks. [...] The factory has given way to the corporation.⁷⁷

Hauck illustrates this kind of shift in the film through the character of Karger and his forced transition from steel worker to car-polish salesman. Deleuze’s conception of a capitalism of higher-order production is then useful in articulating how we might transpose the ideas expressed by Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge that critical cinema must include a critique of capitalism through the figure of the worker for contemporary Western European audiences. For both *Karger* and *Workingman’s Death* address the shifting nature of labour in the West by depicting the negative effects on the worker of this newer ‘mode’ of capitalism.

As stated above, an important element of *Workingman’s Death* that differentiates it from previous generations of worker film is the gap between filmmaker and subject, that is, Glawogger’s autocratic approach towards the task of filming the workers in different corners of the globe. One way in which this gap is narrowed in *Karger* is through a cast that is comprised of only lay actors. During multiple visits to Riesa over the course of the year previous to shooting, Hauck made contact with members of the local community and invited them to casting sessions. All of the steel workers in the film are actual employees in the factory, with the exception of Karger, who is a builder in real life. Hauck has said that her decision to use lay actors was in part inspired by the group of predominantly female directors who studied at the Wiener Akademie – including Jessica Hausner, Barbara Albert and Valeska Grisebach – with

⁷⁷ Gilles Deleuze, ‘Postscript on the Societies of Control’, *October*, 59 (1992), 3–7 (p. 5).

whom she has worked in the past, and whose films she admires.⁷⁸ She has also stated that it was important that the characters in her film spoke with a real Saxon accent, revealing a commitment to an authentic portrayal of this working-class milieu. A further way in which this gap is narrowed is Hauck's own close ties to the film's subject matter; she went to school with 'Karger-Männer' in Riesa, and had personal ties to the local industrial world:

mein Großvater, mein Vater, mein Onkel, die haben alle in dieser Industrie gearbeitet. Die waren nicht alle Arbeiter – mein Vater war Ingenieur, und auf einer ganz anderen Ebene tätig – aber es gab durchaus einen Aspekt davon, denen nochmal Respekt zu erweisen. [...] Also in dem Fall, da hing mein Herz einfach da drin.⁷⁹

Though her decision to use lay actors was as much a necessity for production as it was an aesthetic choice, it is clear that Hauck also strives towards a level of worker self-representation. Her personal investment in the town of Riesa and its fate in the twenty-first century, compounded with the casting process and the film's naturalistic light and sound, implies an allegiance with the 'real' worker. Indeed, Karger's colleagues represent themselves in the film, even though the story and dialogue are fictional.

Thus, whilst both Glawogger and Hauck explicitly state their aim to show respect for the worker, and choose accordingly to film real workers, their admiration is manifest in two formally divergent films. For Glawogger, it translates into highly stylised, breathtaking images that are created using extreme long shots and striking colours, and which are intended to inspire a sense of awe in the viewer. Hauck, on the other hand, shows respect by choosing a form that more closely resembles the previous generations of worker film. In this way, *Karger* comes closer to achieving the kind of democratic form that Benjamin and Kluge upheld as

⁷⁸ Author interview with Elke Hauck, December 2013.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

crucial for the modern subject. Though Hauck does not explicitly reference the worker film tradition, she has spoken of her non-Aristotelian narrative structure in Brechtian terms:

Irgendwas in mir hat sich einfach geweht, [...] auf die konventionellen Erzählstrategien zurückzugreifen. [...] Deswegen habe ich mich eher für diesen epischen Erzählstil entschieden, der eben Dinge auch aneinander reiht, der in einem gewissen Sinne nicht immer sofort den emotionalen Faden aufgreift und mich als Zuschauer im Genick packt, dass ich weinen oder lachen muss, sondern dass ich mir das Ganze erstmals anschauen darf, und sich das Gefühl, was ich dafür habe, erst im Nachhinein entwickelt.⁸⁰

What Hauck refers to as an ‘epic narrative style’ may be understood as the suturing of one scene to the next without providing viewers with the clues that more conventional cause and effect narrative structures offer. The result is a greater distance between viewer and film, preventing viewers from identifying with the characters on an emotional level. In this context, it is useful briefly to consider an excerpt from Benjamin’s writings on Brecht’s new conception of a new, ‘epic’ theatrical practice that stands in opposition to Aristotelian form. Benjamin writes,

was in dieser neuen Dramatik wegfiel, das war die aristotelische “Reinigung”, die Abfuhr der Affekte durch Einfühlung in das bewegte Geschick des Helden. Ein Geschick, das die Bewegung der Woge hat, die das Publikum mit sich fortreißt. [...] Das epische Theater seinerseits rückt [...] in Stößen vor. Seine Grundform ist die des Chocks, mit dem die einzelnen wohlabgehobenen Situationen des Stücks aufeinandertreffen. [...] So entstehen überall Intervalle, die die Illusion des Publikums eher beeinträchtigen. Diese Intervalle sind seiner kritischen Stellungnahme, seinem Nachdenken reserviert.⁸¹

By gesturing towards the kind of relationship that Brecht sought to foster between theatrical performance and audience, then, Hauck invites consideration of *Karger* in the neo-Marxist

⁸⁰ Author interview with Elke Hauck, December 2013.

⁸¹ Walter Benjamin, ‘Das Land, in dem das Proletariat nicht genannt werden darf: zur Uraufführung von acht Einaktern Brechts’ (1938), in *GS* 2, pp. 514–418 (pp. 515–516).

tradition. Hauck's 'respectfulness' extends beyond the depiction of the workers' experience in an authentic or respectful manner: respect is also shown towards the viewers' intellect by desisting from 'grabbing them by the neck', as Hauck put it, and prescribing the required emotional response. This illustrates another way of understanding 'democratic' in the context of this thesis: a filmic form that demands that an audience play a more active role in constructing meaning than in conventional narrative cinema. As a key element of writings by Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge on film, this is a concept to which I return in Chapter Four.

Despite the differing forms, there is another notable commonality between these two twenty-first-century worker films: like *Workingman's Death*, *Karger* also offers a highly gendered account of the worker's experience. Elke Hauck calls *Karger* a 'Männerfilm',⁸² a label that refers not only to the gender of the protagonist, but also to the (in)ability of the men in the film to adapt to economic changes in post-reunification Saxony. Like his colleagues from the steel factory, Karger cuts a hopeless figure in comparison with the film's female characters. The financial independence and social competence of the women in Karger's life – Sabine, Ulrike, and his sister Jana – are emphasised by the various ways in which they are called upon to help him, whether by giving him a lift or by helping him see a doctor despite his not being insured. A female employee at the job centre explains to the three men how to use the computer to search for jobs, and the gender divide is reinforced further in the younger characters: whilst Ulrike's son is visually confined by the windows above and doors below as he repeatedly kicks a ball against the wall in the courtyard, the future mobility of Karger's daughter Clara is implied through the space she is awarded in the frame as she swims, for example, (Figs. 6 & 7) as well as her capacity to play.

One exception to this dichotomy is Sabine's new partner, Georg, whom we see at the end of the film when Karger stops by to say goodbye to his daughter before heading to

⁸² Author interview with Elke Hauck, December 2013.

Holland. Karger has been tended to by female characters up to this point, exemplified most clearly in the scene in which Karger stands, arms folded, instructing his mother which slices of cake she should wrap up for him to take home. This time, Georg pours coffee for Karger, asking whether he would like milk or sugar whilst Karger awkwardly stands, watching him. Given that Georg has assumed Karger's role in the family, he offers an alternative model of masculinity for post-reunification Saxony, one that may have adapted to social and economic transformations by transgressing the traditional gender divide. Considered in the context of the other oppositions that both of these worker films set up between past and future, and east and west, the gendered element to this critique of 'capitalism of higher-order production' is salient.

Like Glawogger, Hauck appears to lament the loss of this kind of traditional masculinity alongside the disappearance of manual labour in Saxony. As in *Workingman's Death*, the camera in *Karger* also invites admiration of the workers' bodies, however the framework of this gaze – a fictionalised narrative, mainly in a non-work setting – results in a more complex process of looking in Hauck's film. Karger does not have any of the special muscles or bone curvature of the Indonesian sulphur workers, nor is he filmed from below in the style of the proletarian films, yet his body is visually celebrated in the film. His frame is broad, he is tattooed and pierced, and his shoulders are often hunched when he sits or stands, his movements gruff. In the shower scene early on in the film, he stands under the shower in an almost frontal medium shot and the camera focuses on his head and torso for 15 seconds (Fig. 8). By filming Karger with his arms behind his head and his eyes closed in a classic cinematic erotic pose, the protagonist is cast as an object of desire, a romantic hero as well as a worker hero. Similarly, in the scene in which Karger undresses his ex-wife following their divorce, Karger's body is awarded significantly more screen time and space than the female body in the frame (Fig. 9). The effect of these scenes is to generate in viewers a libidinal investment in Karger's character, to heighten the sense of loss when he fails to succeed. When he loses his

job as a pipe worker, Karger is metaphorically castrated: the demise of authentic labour is associated with the loss of his masculinity.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

There are several compelling ways in which *Workingman's Death* and *Karger* can be read in the tradition of the proletarian films of the Weimar Republic and the West German *Arbeiterfilme*. Both films address the subject of manual labour and the figure of the worker in the twenty-first century, and both directors gesture towards a moral imperative to their work by pledging to show respect for their working subjects. Hauck's research methods and use of lay actors positions her more firmly in this tradition in terms of form. Of the two directors, Hauck comes closest to performing the role of artist-collaborator lauded by Kluge since her manner of showing respect is Brechtian in character. For Glawogger, the artistic process is non-democratic, and the worker remains the object of the camera's gaze only.

The character of the worker has changed significantly, however: both films suggest that in Germany, the (male) proletarian worker of Weimar- and West Germany is on the verge of extinction and has been superseded by another kind of worker – a travelling car-polish salesman, for example. Further, the workers are neither politicised nor structured in *Workingman's Death* and *Karger*. The apparent powerlessness of Karger and the manual labourers in Ukraine, Pakistan, Indonesia and China is a stark contrast to the workers' revolutionary spirit in the Russian Revolution films and the German proletarian films, the characteristic that earns these films the particular praise of Benjamin and Kracauer.

Though a leftist-political anti-capitalist spark is present, it is manifested differently in these films as compared to the previous generations of worker film. To varying extents, *Workingman's Death* and *Karger* set up oppositions between past and present, old and young,

authentic and superficial, east and west, and masculine and feminine, in order to critique the global dominance of a 'capitalism of higher-order production' in Deleuzian terms. Their anti-capitalist contribution is the making visible of that which is increasingly abstracted and obscured; they do not allow viewers to choose to remain ignorant of the human cost in the prevailing economic system. The directors therefore engage with the contemporary political landscape using less direct methods than in the earlier worker films, which instead relied upon politically active characters to prompt viewer identification. This shift is perhaps indicative of socio-economic changes in Germany that have widened the gap between the film-going general public and the character of the worker. As the middle-classes grow and the range of blue-collar jobs shrinks, manual labourers like Karger are forced to migrate or perform a different kind of unskilled work.

The usefulness of updating the ideas of Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge relating to the worker film lies herein. Pointing towards the gap between viewer and worker forces us ask: who is the new German worker, and against whom would he or she revolt? And what happens to those who are left behind by a capitalism of higher-order production? As Hauck asks, '[können] sich denn wirklich alle so wandeln?'⁸³ In the next chapter, I examine a different kind of truthfulness in film proposed by the three thinkers, one that is concerned with form alongside content.

⁸³ Author interview with Elke Hauck, December 2013.

CHAPTER THREE

THE POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITS OF CAPTURING REALITY: ANGELA SCHANELEC'S *MARSEILLE* (2004), ANDREAS DRESEN'S *HALT AUF FREIER STRECKE* (2011), AND GERHARD FRIEDL'S *HAT WOLFF VON AMERONGEN KONKURSDELIKTE BEGANGEN?* (2004)

Is a two-dimensional projected image capable of capturing the historical, cultural and political networks that constitute reality? Can the reality of the camera-eye ever claim to represent a viewer's subjective experience? As shown in the previous chapter, ideas of authenticity in terms of content (relating to the worker) are central to the theoretical arguments relating to film put forward by Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge. In Chapter Four, I show how the thinkers' interpretations of a truthful form can productively be aligned with Michael Haneke's pledge to tell stories honestly ('*ehrlich erzählen*'¹). This chapter is also concerned with notions of truthfulness and authenticity, but on a more fundamental level: it examines the basic relationship between the cinematic apparatus and reality – real people and the worlds they inhabit – as conceived by Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge, and considers this in light of contemporary German-language films.

The idea of a physical reality that can be captured on celluloid is one that is faithfully defended by Kracauer and decidedly rejected by Kluge. A point of commonality in the film-theoretical texts of Kracauer, Benjamin, and Kluge, however, is the political significance of these questions. The underlying concerns are the same: how can a film represent a world that is itself unsatisfactory? Is to mirror the status quo to endorse it?

¹ See Chapter Four, p. 160. The quote is taken from the Michael Haneke interview with Serge Toubiana, included on the DVD *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*, dir. by Michael Haneke (Artificial Eye, 1994).

What is the most effective way of engaging with the material world if a film is intended to elicit a change or a political reaction in viewers? To describe the thinkers' different approaches to these questions as their ruminations on filmic realism would be to simplify the matter at hand. Given their respective criticisms of mainstream productions at different points in the twentieth century, it is unsurprising that neither Benjamin, Kracauer, nor Kluge are in favour of the narrative structures typical of classical Hollywood cinema and the stylistic devices employed to support these.² They eschew the kind of realism that Marco Abel refers to as 'seamless' in films that draw upon the 'shot/counter-shot shooting style that ends up "naturalizing" film images as representing an unmediated "real" world'.³ It would also be incorrect to refer loosely to Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge as advocates of an art-cinema realism characterised by French realist auteurs,⁴ or a Bazinian 'objective' or 'pure' realism. The three thinkers' theories on the relationship between the camera and the reality it claims to represent are at times conflicting and question the very need for the notion of *vraisemblance* in narrative cinema (an idea that is generally associated with any kind of filmic realism).

In the present chapter, I apply the multi-faceted theoretical approaches put forward by Kracauer, Benjamin, and Kluge concerning film and reality to three contemporary German-language films: *Marseille* (2004) by Angela Schanelec, *Halt auf freier Strecke* (2011) by Andreas Dresen, and *Hat Wolff von Amerongen Konkursdelikte begangen?* (2004) by Gerhard Friedl. This is the theoretical strand where the thinkers diverge the most: as I show below when I engage in his *Theory of Film* in greater depth, Kracauer differs quite significantly from Kluge in his conception of what of reality the camera could – and should – capture. However, the aim of my chapter is firstly to illuminate some surprising points of crossover.

² Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson trace the evolution of what became the prevailing stylistic and production mode of American film, embodied in 1960s Hollywood films, in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985).

³ Marco Abel, *Violent Affect: Literature, Cinema, and Critique After Representation* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), p. 146.

⁴ David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 206–208.

Secondly, given that the ‘realities’ to which Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge each refer in their texts are far removed from the ‘realities’ with which Schanelec, Dresen and Friedl engage, I question the extent to which these – at times quite radical – ideas have retained their currency.

READING *MARSEILLE* THROUGH KRACAUER’S *THEORY OF FILM*

The tendency described in Chapter One to divide Kracauer’s body of work into distinct periods has in part been driven by criticism of his shifting attitude towards filmic realism. ‘The sociological critic turned melancholy realist’ describes a pervasive perception of the thinker.⁵ Adorno’s portrayal of Kracauer as a ‘wunderlicher Realist’ in his talk to celebrate the film-theorist’s seventy-fifth birthday has a condescending tone.⁶ Adorno speculates that Kracauer’s ‘naïve realism’ in his later texts stems from a pressure he felt to conform during his exile in the United States. I will put questions of historiography aside in this chapter, and instead focus on the ‘distinctive colour’ of Kracauer’s realism, the hues of which emerge most clearly in *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (1960).⁷

⁵ Patrice Petro, ‘Kracauer’s Epistemological Shift’, in *Perspectives on German Cinema*, ed. by Terri Ginsberg and Kirsten Moana Thompson (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1996), pp. 93–103 (p. 97). Petro provides a concise summary of the arguments put forward by Schlüpmann, Elsaesser and others to support the idea of a chronological divide in Kracauer’s work.

⁶ The talk was first broadcast on the *Hessischer Rundfunk* in 1964 on the occasion of Kracauer’s 75th birthday. See Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Der wunderliche Realist: Über Siegfried Kracauer’, in *Gesammelte Schriften* 11, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), pp. 388–408. Adorno describes Kracauer’s ‘Realismus besonderer Farbe’ on p. 407. The essay was the topic of much discussion and dispute between the two. See Martin Jay, ‘Adorno and Kracauer: Notes on a Troubled Friendship’, *Salmagundi*, 40 (1978), 42–66 (pp. 61–65).

⁷ Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997). Further references to this work in this chapter will use the abbreviation ‘TF’.

While it is now considered a canonical text, the book's reception at the time of publication was mixed. It provoked disappointment and infuriation among many fans of Kracauer's *Ideologiekritik* of the 1920s and 1930s.⁸ Gertrud Koch writes,

Theory of Film [ist nicht] nur eine Filmtheorie, sondern auch eine irritierende Stellungnahme zur Sichtbarkeit der Welt und den daraus resultierenden epistemischen und moralischen Möglichkeiten und Verpflichtungen.⁹

Kracauer's theory of realism is normative, detailing which properties render a film cinematic and thereby legitimate. He begins by tracing a history of realist tendencies in photography, and frames the moving image within this tradition:

The basic properties [of film] are identical with the properties of photography. Film, in other words, is uniquely equipped to record and reveal physical reality, and, hence, gravitates toward it.¹⁰

The function of film, Kracauer maintains, is to 'record and reveal physical reality', and this is the central motif of *Theory of Film*. Films that embrace the realist tendency come closest to fulfilling this function, he argues. The body of the monograph comprises 15 chapters in which Kracauer details the various form- and content-related ways that a film can record and reveal physical reality, which he also calls 'material reality', 'physical existence', 'actuality', 'nature', 'camera-reality', and, finally, 'life'.¹¹ These include, for example: recording subject matter that Kracauer deems particularly cinematic; using formal devices such as the close-up to reveal new constellations; or the use of dialogue, sound and music sparingly in order to emphasise the photographed image. In the book's epilogue, Kracauer

⁸ See Petro, 'Kracauer's Epistemological Shift'. In addition to Dudley Andrew's unfavourable comparison between Bazin and Kracauer in Dudley Andrew, *The Major Film Theories: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 107, other disparaging voices include Pauline Kael in e.g. 'Is there a Cure for Film Criticism? Or: Some Unhappy Thoughts on Siegfried Kracauer's Nature of Film [sic]', *Sight and Sound*, 31 (1962), 56–64, and Andrew Tudor, *Theories of Film* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1974), p. 79.

⁹ Gertrud Koch, *Kracauer zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius, 1996), p. 125.

¹⁰ Kracauer, *TF*, p. 28.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

lays bare the political and moral implications of his argument, justifying his criteria pertaining to the cinematic. The following analysis of Angela Schanelec's fourth feature film *Marseille* (2004) using Kracauer's *Theory of Film* elaborates on some of these filmic principles laid out by Kracauer, and takes into account the political imperative of his theory.

Marseille premiered at the 'un certain regard' section of Cannes Film Festival in 2004, and was awarded the prize for the best screenplay by the German Film Critics' Association (*Verband der deutschen Filmkritik*) in 2004. The film was not a hit with all critics, however. *Variety* film reviewer Derek Elley wrote about *Marseille* when it was shown in Cannes,

Marseille, [is] the most maddeningly pretentious film-reverie yet from Germany's poetess of emptiness, Angela Schanelec (*Places in the City*). Perverse, frequently baffling 'story' about a German woman mooning around in southern France and Berlin has zero commercial potential outside the fest circuit.¹²

Elley was correct in predicting minimal commercial success – the film attracted a mere 3,100 viewers in Germany.¹³ His polemical response alludes to the unconventional formal and narrative devices that Schanelec employs in *Marseille*: the failure to present a 'real' story, the choice to show a woman 'mooning around'. These may be considered as a set of cinematic principles, reflecting the director's distinctive kind of realism. In this section of the chapter, I attempt to define these filmic principles and explore how they can be mapped onto the basic properties of film that Kracauer uses in *Theory of Film* to construct his definition of an 'aesthetically valid' realism. Though the formal devices employed by Schanelec do not correspond exactly to Kracauer's criteria, there are some remarkable parallels between *Marseille* and the filmic ideal(s) described in *Theory of Film*. Further, by

¹² Derek Elley, 'Review: "Marseille"', *Variety*, 238 (2004)

<<http://variety.com/2004/film/reviews/marseille-1200533251/>> [accessed April 2014].

¹³ Marco Abel, 'Intensifying Life: The Cinema of the "Berlin School"', *Cineaste*, 33 (2008) <<http://www.cineaste.com/articles/the-berlin-school.htm>> [accessed January 2014]

drawing attention to the points of overlap between Kracauer's theory and Schanelec's practice, I question the limitations and possibilities of my act of reading: is it possible to identify a political imperative in Schanelec's filmmaking too, which can be aligned with Kracauer's call to arms in *Theory of Film*?

Schanelec's 'perverse' approach to narrative has been summarised by another critic as follows: 'Die Mittel der Angela Schanelec, das ist einfach zu verstehen, sind Bilder und Töne und ihre Organisation in der Zeit',¹⁴ an observation that she and her long-time cinematographer Reinhold Vorschneider corroborate. Speaking about *Marseille*, she states, 'Die Handlung besteht darin, dass der Ort gewechselt wird'.¹⁵ The story is linear and chronological, despite the 'baffling' lack of a conventional narrative arc comprised of a set-up, confrontation and resolution. *Marseille* is made up not of dialogic or dramatic plot markers, but of spatial place-changes (from one scene to the next), and geographical place-changes (from one place to the next). The protagonist, Sophie, is in her late twenties and has arrived in Marseille for a short-term apartment swap with Zelda, who is to stay in her Berlin apartment. Sophie walks around, observing the city through the lens of her camera. Narrative progression is indicated using different day- and night-time markers: she shops for food, goes to a bar, and tapes photographs to the walls of the apartment.

The first 'event' to take place after Sophie's arrival occurs an indeterminate number of days later, almost a quarter of the way into the film. Sophie asks Pierre, a mechanic at a garage near her apartment, whether he can lend her a car for a short trip. Upon her return, she chats to Pierre and goes dancing with him and his friends. The first geographical 'Ortswechsel' then takes place as we see our protagonist walking along a street in Berlin. Here, Sophie meets up with her best friend Hanna and her husband Ivan, whose lives we briefly follow, too. The marriage between the theatre actress and photographer appears strained. Sophie tells Ivan of her intention to return to Marseille, so

¹⁴ Rolf Aurich, 'Blicke durch Fenster: Angela Schanelec und ihre etwas schwermütigen Filme', *film-dienst*, 7 (2002), 6–9 (p. 9).

¹⁵ *Das Kino der Angela Schanelec*, dir. by Geremia Carrara, DVD extra on *Mein langsames Leben*, dir. by Angela Schanelec (Filmgalerie 451, 2001).

we are able to recognise the city's streets when we see her walking along a road in the last section of the film. From here, the film cuts to a police station in which Sophie is sitting in a small interview room with a translator, talking to a police officer. She speaks in German and then in French, and it becomes clear that she has been mugged and is giving her statement. The outcome of the appointment is not revealed. Afterwards, we follow Sophie as she walks along a sunny, tree-lined road in Marseille before crossing over to a large gated building with an eagle signifying the Federal Republic of Germany on the front. The final 'Ortswechsel' is composed of several long takes of a beach in Marseille at dusk, on which people play ball, stroll and swim as seagulls fly overhead and the sun slowly sets in the sky, giving way to night.

To a query posed by an interviewer about the storyline of *Marseille*, Angela Schanelec replies questioningly, 'die Geschichte?'¹⁶ Whilst this may simply be interpreted as an obtuse reaction to a question she perhaps perceives as banal, I am more inclined to agree with film theorist Marco Abel, who reads Schanelec's refusal to unpick the narrative of her film for the interviewer as a demonstrative act of defiance against the expectation of comprehensibility:

Schanelec's interrogative response rhetorically counters her interlocutor's implied demand to know what the story is – a demand that tries to pin down the director [...] to concede as normal or natural the very requirements most viewers implicitly and explicitly make of cinema.¹⁷

Her rejection of the idea that the film(maker) must exhibit full transparency thus translates into a guiding principle for the film:

Was der Zuschauer sich vorstellen kann, was ich seiner Phantasie überlassen kann, das will ich ihm nicht zeigen. Letztendlich ist es das, worüber ich

¹⁶ Interview with Angela Schanelec in the press kit of *Marseille*
<<http://www.peripherfilm.de/marseille/Presseheft%20Marseille%2019.04.04.pdf>> [accessed April 2014].

¹⁷ Marco Abel, *The Counter-Cinema of the Berlin School* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2013), p. 115.

nachdenke: wie setze ich die Phantasie des Zuschauers frei, wie mache ich ihm Lust, mir zu folgen?¹⁸

In *Marseille*, there is no illusion of a whole world or complete story to which we are privy. Instead, Schanelec offers the viewer an array of narrative ellipses intended to set the cogs of his or her imagination in motion. These function in different ways: firstly, there are temporal ellipses between scenes or sequences, for example when Sophie returns to Berlin from Marseille for the first time. The film cuts directly from Sophie and Pierre in a nightclub in Marseille to Sophie approaching a well-lit road junction at night. Temporal continuity is implied from the time of day; it is feasible that Sophie is returning home from the club. A young woman runs after Sophie, handing her a hat that she had left behind in the place she had just left, speaking to her in German; we are left to deduce that her time in Marseille has come to end from the sudden change of language in the film. None of the ubiquitous travel shots are shown to the viewer as a metonym for her journey. Secondly, Schanelec includes plot elements that remain mysterious due to the omission of background information or contextualisation. For example, we might ask what happened to Zelda, since it emerges that she never stayed in the Berlin apartment. What is Sophie's relationship to Ivan? Does she love him? And why does Hanna run, seemingly frightened, from one side of a park to the other? Whilst some of the ellipses are more significant to the plot than others, the combined effect is to create a text that is open to multiple readings; a high degree of imaginative interpretation is required to 'make sense' of the story. Whilst Marco Abel's Deleuzian reading of Schanelec's 'uncommunicative' narrative style considers her filmmaking political in that she 'foregrounds the neoliberal imperative to communicate ("Express yourself!")' in an age of control societies,¹⁹ Schanelec's emphasis

¹⁸ Interview with Angela Schanelec in the press kit for *Marseille*.

¹⁹ Abel, *The Counter-Cinema*, p. 114. Abel quotes Gilles Deleuze, 'Control and Becoming' in *Negotiations 1972-1990*, trans. by Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 169-179 (p. 175).

on her viewers' imaginations may equally be read as a Klugerian protest against the idea of 'Begriffsimperialismus' (conceptual imperialism) in mainstream media.²⁰

The fragmented plot of *Marseille* could be productively analysed alongside Michael Haneke's oeuvre in the following chapter. There are some striking parallels with *Code Inconnu Récit incomplet de divers voyages* (2000), for example: a 'glacial couple' comprising an actress and photographer (Hanna and Ivan, Anne and George); the scenes of a film within a film or of a play within a film; the actress character used to bring attention to staged realities; and the social milieu. Further, Schanelec's pledge to free her spectators' imaginations echoes Haneke's advocacy of an 'aesthetic room-for-play' in his films.²¹ However, the way that the two directors select and piece together their narrative fragments differs, and it is here that Kracauer's *Theory of Film* becomes a useful lens through which to read Schanelec's film. Viewers of *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls* are shown the defining events and plot triggers – Max learning about a classmate's suicide, for example, and his own suicide – yet this is not the case in *Marseille*. Here, key fragments are omitted from the film. Put differently, Haneke, in the films I examine in Chapter Four – and indeed in most of his work – approaches a cause-and-effect logic, whereby the viewer is asked to reflect on the space between the fragments in order to determine the possible causes of the events that take place. In *Marseille*, however, Schanelec does not employ plot triggers to propel the story forward but instead 'changes the place'.

This quite subtle difference pushes Schanelec into the sphere of the avant-garde as defined by Kracauer:

²⁰ Alexander Kluge, 'Der Zuschauer als Unternehmer' (1979), in Alexander Kluge, *Die Patriotin* (Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins, 1979), pp. 300–301 (p. 301). Kluge writes, 'Das vollständige Verstehen von Filmen ist Begriffsimperialismus, kolonialisiert die Gegenstände. Wenn ich alles verstanden habe, ist etwas leergeworden.'

²¹ Thomas Assheuer, *Nahaufnahme Michael Haneke: Gespräche mit Thomas Assheuer* (Berlin: Alexander, 2008), pp. 32–33. Haneke talks about the formal devices to create 'Spielraum' for viewers' imaginations, a point that I discuss in greater depth in Chapter Four, p. 158.

The *avant-garde* artists broke away from the commercialized cinema [...] out of the conviction that the story as the main element of feature films is something alien to the medium.²²

For Kracauer, avant-garde filmmakers are ultimately more focused on ‘inner [subjective] impulses’ than on capturing material reality, yet he values their embracing of non-human subjects and their ‘intense preoccupation with cinematic techniques and devices’.²³ He considers conventional narrative cinema too human: a cinema that is fixated solely on human experience is not fulfilling its true potential since it fails to record and reveal physical reality. This is perhaps the principal difference between Schanelec and Haneke, and indeed what defines Schanelec’s cinematic approach to narrative in *Marseille*: the story is not the driving force of the film, nor is the film constructed around human experience. We do not follow actions and events that occur as a result of characters’ decisions; they do not assume a causal role. Rather, the characters appear as relatively insignificant figures moving in a narrow set of socio-economic circles with their corresponding physical locations. *Marseille* does not employ any of the elements that Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson ascribe to classical Hollywood story construction: ‘causality, consequence, psychological motivations, the drive toward overcoming obstacles and achieving goals’.²⁴ Sophie’s mugging is another one of the film’s ellipses; the viewer is not ‘rewarded’ with an explanation of what happened. Schanelec has commented on this decision:

Der Überfall müsste völlig unangekündigt, nicht als dramaturgisches Moment, aus dem sich eine Geschichte entwickelt, erzählt werden, sondern als etwas, das passiert, ohne dass man es benutzt. Es passiert einfach.²⁵

²²Kracauer, *TF*, p. 178.

²³*Ibid.*, pp. 180–181.

²⁴Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, p. 13.

²⁵Nicolas Wackerbarth and Christoph Hochhäusler, ‘Angela Schanelec & Reinhold Vorschneider’, in *Revolver* 13, ed. by Jens Börner, Benjamin Heisenberg, Christoph Hochhäusler and Nicolas Wackerbarth (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Autoren, 2005), pp. 8–42 (p. 11).

The idea that a filmic occurrence such as an accident should not be exploited emphasises Schanelec's unconventional narrative approach. The most 'dramatic' incident is not shown – it has no identifiable perpetrator, and Sophie's incoherent explanation of events is not intended to provoke pity, fear, or indeed any emotional response from the viewer. Schanelec's guiding principles concerning what film should and should not do thus entail a rejection of Aristotelian dramatic convention: by quelling viewer expectations, she leaves space for viewers to fill in the gaps themselves, which we might consider an ethical decision.

The notable exception to this anti-dramatic course of non-events is the scene in the theatre, where Hanna is rehearsing for Dürrenmatt's 1968 *Play Strindberg*, which is used to off-set the film's resolute refusal to stage its events as a means of generating emotion or entertainment. If it is not immediately clear from the initial image of a man in uniform conversing with his wife, who is off-frame, that the dark background is a theatrical stage, the pan and resulting long-shot contextualise the scene for the viewer (Fig. 10). Hanna plays the maid to the bickering married couple, and an off-screen voice giving instructions for the lighting eventually breaks the fourth wall, revealing the presence of the director. The scene is rehearsed twice, and the second time, the camera focuses on the character of the wife during the conversation. This dramatic interlude creates a stark opposition between the language and gestures of the theatre and those of the characters outside of the theatre. The subject of Dürrenmatt's play is human experience and emotion: it is an intense, 12-part portrait of a married couple's strife. Hanna acts as a bridge between the two discrete worlds of the theatre stage and of Sophie and Ivan, attempting to straddle the two by transposing the language and culture of one into the other:

HANNA: Früher hatten die Leute einen Arzt, der war immer bei ihnen, der gehörte einfach dazu.

IVAN: [Dialling a number on the telephone] Wann, früher?

HANNA: Bei Tschechow, da gibts immer einen Arzt, der Bescheid weiß, der geliebt wird, heimlich, oder der selber liebt aber natürlich unglücklich, der zuständig ist für die Krankheiten, für diese ganzen Krankheiten...

IVAN: [Into the telephone] Ich bin's. Kannst du anrufen und Bescheid sagen, dass ich etwas verspätet bin? [Pause] Circa 20 Minuten. [Pause] Nein, nein. Bis gleich.

HANNA: ...wie zum Beispiel Sehnsucht, Hoffnung, Verzweiflung...

IVAN: [Turning to the cleaner and placing money on a table] Beate? Ich lege sie hin.

HANNA: Landärzte, eben. Ich brauche einen Landarzt.²⁶

As Ivan prepares to leave the apartment, standing with his back to her, Hanna appears out of place, to be speaking a language that Ivan seems or chooses not to understand. He cannot engage with her world of theatrical intrigue. (The reference to Kafka's 'Landarzt' perhaps also alludes to the film's rejection of conventional narrative structures.²⁷) The constricting nature of their marriage is evident in the stage-like framing of the two characters between an open door, inviting parallels with the bickering married couple in the play. Kracauer writes about the value of juxtaposing the theatrical and the non-theatrical within a film:

Stage interludes within otherwise realistic films assume a cinematic function to the extent that they throw into relief the flow of life from which they detach themselves. Paradoxical as it may seem, the stagy, normally against the grain of the medium, assumes a positive aesthetic function if it is made to enhance the unstaged.²⁸

Implicit in this statement is that the same applies to the 'stagy' characters within such stage interludes, that the actors within the theatre in the film would serve to underscore the

²⁶ All quotations from the film refer to *Marseille*, dir. by Angela Schanelec (Filmgalerie 451, 2004).

²⁷ 'Ein Landarzt' was first published in 1918. Franz Kafka, *Ein Landarzt: Kleine Erzählungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 2003).

²⁸ Kracauer, *TF*, p. 73.

‘unstagedness’ of the other characters in the ‘otherwise realistic’ film. Whilst Schanelec’s protagonists at no point appear unstaged or real, Kracauer’s comment above is useful in considering the oppositions that she constructs within *Marseille*. For Hanna’s character certainly ‘throws into relief’ the differences between her and Ivan, or her and Sophie, for example: Hanna draws attention to the non-dramatic nature of the interactions between other characters. Indeed, Sophie accuses her friend of putting on an act when she reveals her unhappiness to Sophie: ‘Du bist nicht unglücklich, du spielst das bloß. Du spielst das, weil du immer etwas spielen musst’. The message is clear: dramatic language has no place in the diegetic reality of *Marseille*.

As we saw above, Marco Abel writes extensively about the sense of disconnect that troubles the characters in Schanelec’s oeuvre, reading the permeation of her films’ dialogue with repetition, banalities and instances of incommunicability as an attempt to ‘disrupt the seamless flow of self-expressive communication that is encouraged by the “repressive forces” of control’ that are described by Deleuze.²⁹ I would certainly agree with this, and align the characters in *Marseille* with some of Haneke’s more glacial characters in the films I examine in Chapter 4. In *Marseille* we see unusual subjectivities: whereas classical film uses characters’ transparent emotional and psychological states and dialogue to alert the viewer as to how to read a situation and communicate what is happening, *Marseille* forces a more attentive reading of the situations presented. Schanelec’s narrative choices can thus be mapped onto Kracauer’s theory of realist cinema in a number of ways. As well as her use of the stage interlude as a formal device, she, too, appears to reject the character-driven film, an *avant-garde* gesture representing, in Kracauer’s words, ‘a revolt against the story film as such, a concerted effort to shake off the fetters of the intrigue’.³⁰ A further overlap between theory and practice is the recording of the characters’ environments in a way that

²⁹ See p. 85 of this chapter. Abel, *The Counter-Cinema*, p. 122. Abel quotes Deleuze, ‘Control and Becoming’, p. 175.

³⁰ Kracauer, *TF*, p. 178.

suggests that for Schanelec, too, the image – and the transition from one image to the next, the ‘Ortswechsel’ – is the primary carrier of meaning, rather than dialogue.

In keeping with this cinematic principle, one of the most striking formal characteristics of the film is the low number of shots: with only 75 shots, the 90-minute film has an average shot length (ASL) of 72 seconds, which is significantly higher than the 3-6 second ASL that has come to be standard in Hollywood.³¹ Bordwell observes that an accelerated cutting style can be observed in art cinema as well as in mainstream U.S. cinema, noting that ‘directors like Roman Polanski and Mike Nichols, who once favored exceptionally long takes, have joined the trend’.³² The slow pace of *Marseille* perhaps contributes to what Elley pejoratively calls a ‘reverie’: long static takes and extended pans and tracking shots make up almost the entirety of the film, and these are generally formatted as a medium, long or extreme-long shot. It is worth noting that the techniques identified by Kracauer for recording and revealing physical reality – ‘the big’, ‘the small’, ‘the close-up’, ‘the transient’³³, for example – are used sparingly in the film. Nevertheless, there is certainly a sense of recording and documenting the spaces that Sophie inhabits; much of Sophie’s time in Marseille is filmed in outside areas. We observe her moving through the city, knowing as viewers neither where she is coming from nor where she is going.

The first ten minutes of the film present a series of such shots. For example, a thirty-second shot shows Sophie walking down a street towards the stationary camera, framed as a long shot, which changes to a medium shot as she passes by; the camera travels backwards slightly and follows her movements, slowly panning 120 degrees to capture her as she moves further in the other direction, returning to a long shot (Figs. 11 to 15). The camera position and movement mimics the viewpoint of a person stood watching Sophie, turning their head and taking a small step backwards as she passes. This is followed by

³¹ David Bordwell, *As Hollywood Tells It* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), p. 123.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 124.

³³ Kracauer, *TF*, pp. 46–59.

another long take in which the camera movement echoes that of the previous scene: Sophie descends a set of steps, moving further into the frame as she passes by the camera. A mechanic is using a loud machine on a car in the foreground, and the camera pans, keeping Sophie in focus in the middle ground as she crosses the road away from the camera. Again, our viewpoint is that of an onlooker: we are rooted to the spot, watching as she disappears into the fruit and vegetable shop on the other side of the road. The camera remains stationary and focused on the shop front. Cars and buses pass by in the middle ground, and the mechanic dominates the left side of the screen in the foreground (Fig. 16). Sophie eventually emerges from the shop and walks out of the frame to the left. The shot ends here, however there are a number of comparable shots in which the camera remains focused on a building or road for several seconds after the protagonist has left the frame. These long takes at the start of the film do not draw attention a series of mishaps or events that happen during these walks or journeys – we do not see her interaction with the shopkeeper. Rather, her movement is the end in itself, and the camera bears witness to little more than her presence in the city.

The section of the film set in Berlin has more static interior shots, and these, too, are filmed in long takes. The abovementioned scene with Hanna and Ivan lasts two-and-a-half minutes, as does the scene in which Sophie is helping Ivan with his and Hanna's son Anton in their apartment. Here, the static camera films the three characters through two doorframes (Fig. 17). As the characters talk to one another, moving between the kitchen in the middle ground and the dining area in the background, the camera viewpoint is that of an observer rather than a fly on the wall. This scene effectively demonstrates another reason why there are so few shots in *Marseille*: Schanelec refrains from employing conventional shot/reverse shots when filming dialogue. Rather than filming a close-up of Sophie's face as she tells Ivan that she was in Marseille and that she plans to go again, and intercutting this image with reaction shots of Ivan, the two characters are framed in a static medium long shot, and Ivan's face is obscured by the reflections on the window (Fig. 18).

In a similar rejection of formal convention, we are also often not ‘allowed’ to see what has caught Sophie’s attention when she stands at the top of an escalator with her back to us staring down onto streets below, or what is the focus of her camera’s gaze as she faces ongoing traffic in the middle of a road, looking through the lens for a long 40 seconds. We are left behind in a bus, for example, as Sophie gets off and walks away, as if our journey with the protagonist can only go so far. Here, Schanelec privileges the *unknown*; thus the number of shots is drastically reduced through camera work that appears to ‘look on’ rather than to reveal information about the protagonist.

Schanelec’s cinematographer Reinhold Vorschneider has commented on their decision to shoot in this way:

die Einstellungen [sollten] im Verhältnis zueinander eine bestimmte Autonomie, eine Selbstständigkeit haben. Das heisst, dass es nicht einen ‘Master’ und einen ‘Slave’ gibt, also keine Hierarchie unter den Einstellungen, sondern Einstellungen die, obwohl es natürlich ein Vorher und ein Nachher gibt, eine relative Autonomie zueinander haben.³⁴

A reason for avoiding shot/reverse shots or shots that are intercut with others in order to show the object of Sophie’s gaze, for example, is so as not to define one shot using another (in a master/slave dynamic). In addition to the rejection of a hierarchical relationship between images, Schanelec also considers this standard form of editing to be interruptive: ‘Ein Bild folgt auf das andere. Zu einem Bild zurückzukehren geht nicht. [...] Es entspricht nicht der Form von Fluss, an die ich denke’.³⁵ This strategy can be interpreted in multiple ways: Abel notes that the omission of shot/reverse shots visually denies the assumption of communicative understanding between characters, and thus contributes to the director’s narrative principle of non-comprehensibility.³⁶ A further formal consequence is realist in

³⁴ Wackerbarth and Hochhäusler, ‘Angela Schanelec & Reinhold Vorschneider’, p. 27.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 28.

³⁶ Abel, *The Counter-Cinema*, p. 117.

effect: it is a structure that reduces the degree of intervention and thus more closely approximates the actual gaze.

The formal qualities of *Marseille* have been subject to scrutiny by film theorists and critics alike, and are often considered characteristic of the ‘Berlin School’ of films, to which Elke Hauck is also assigned. Dominik Graf and other high-profile figures have publicly dismissed the ‘neuer deutscher Formalismus’ as the exploitation of ‘Form als Schutzschild gegen das Leben’.³⁷ Meanwhile, Abel sees Graf’s ‘Schutzschild’ as an ‘aesthetic of reduction’;³⁸ other filmmakers and critics argue that Schanelec, Petzold and others seek to do precisely the opposite of what Graf claims, constructing a ‘cinema that deals with the reality of life’.³⁹ Schanelec clearly exhibits a commitment to recording ‘real life’ within the framework of a fiction film. Rather, she looks to penetrate the ‘armour’ created by the illusionary realities presented in the kind of genre films made by Graf in the tradition of classical Hollywood narrative convention. *Marseille* focuses our attention on the material reality of non-spectacular spaces that approximate ‘real life’ for most of the film’s Western European viewers. As David Clarke observes, the spaces occupied by the protagonist are best described as ‘non-places’ as defined by the anthropologist Marc Augé:

that is to say locations that express the conditions of an advanced capitalist modernity, favoring the anonymous movement of individuals through often highly administered and commercialized zones that resist attempts to linger and connect with others.⁴⁰

³⁷ Dominik Graf, ‘Unerlebte Filme’, *Schnitt*, 43 (2006), 62–65 (p. 64).

³⁸ See Abel, ‘Intensifying Life: The Cinema of the “Berlin School”’. ‘Reduced’ here means that the films often employ naturalistic lighting, non-professional actors, sparse extra-diegetic sound, and so on. Often, counter-intuitively, the ‘reduced aesthetic’ described by Abel intends to counter closed meanings and is in that sense perhaps better described as an aesthetic of non-reductiveness.

³⁹ Abel quotes Berlin School filmmaker Benjamin Heisenberg in *The Counter-Cinema*, p. ii. He offers a comprehensive overview of the backlash against the School on pp. 12–14.

⁴⁰ David Clarke, “‘Capitalism Has No More Natural Enemies’: The Berlin School”, in *A Companion to German Cinema*, ed. by Terri Ginsberg and Andrea Mensch (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2012), pp. 134–154 (p. 141). Clarke quotes Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. by J. Howe (London: Verso, 1995), p. 79. Jana Heberlein also draws on Augé to describe Schanelec’s spaces in Jana Heberlein, *Die ‘Neue Berliner Schule’. Zwischen Verflachung und Tiefe: Ein ästhetisches Spannungsfeld in den Filmen von Angela Schanelec* (Stuttgart: ibidem, 2012), p. 77.

For Sophie, these include shopping centres, traffic intersections, bridges and motorways; they are urban spaces that are at once everywhere and nowhere. In a kind of mise-en-abyme, these non-places are also the focus of Sophie's photography; we see her tack photographs of human-less, anonymous locations in Marseille on to the wall of the apartment (see Fig. 19). The images of the city we see through the lens of the director and her protagonist appear ordinary and lack obvious distinctive features. Our eyes scan these images a number of times in order to seek out the extraordinary, or the filmic, in the everyday realist aesthetic with which we are confronted. In an interview with Revolver, Schanelec explains how she and Reinhold Vorschneider sought out locations before she wrote the script, and how certain scenes arose in part as a result of a visit to particular locations:

Diese erste Reise nach Marseille, als ich alleine dort war, hat das Drehbuch, was ich dann angefangen habe, extrem beeinflusst. Es gab Szenen, die ich nur geschrieben habe, weil ich vorher in Marseille war.⁴¹

This is true of both exteriors and interiors: when asked about the extent to which sets are constructed for shoots, Vorschneider says:

Ich glaube idealtypisch ist es schon, dass man das alles sozusagen in der Wirklichkeit findet. Du [Schanelec] beschreibst es ja auch für Dich immer als einen spannenden Prozess, von diesem Text in eine Art Realität zu gehen. Das sind jetzt natürlich fragwürdige Begriffe. Sozusagen diesem vorher Gedachten eine vorgefundene oder dokumentarische Dimension dazu zu geben.⁴²

Vorschneider further explains that Schanelec was 'fast obsessiv' about shooting only with natural light when they first started working together: 'Klassische filmische Mittel wie die Aufhellung waren tabu'.⁴³ Indeed, lighting in *Marseille* is stripped down to a minimum, which has the effect of reducing the cinematic sheen that films shot on sets often emit as a

⁴¹ Wackerbarth and Hochhäusler, 'Angela Schanelec & Reinhold Vorschneider', p. 13.

⁴² Ibid., p. 17.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 19.

result of a clarity of image that could not be achieved using natural light only. The exception is again the artificially lit theatre scene, in which we hear the director calling for more light and see the stage lighting brighten and dim accordingly. This again throws into relief the naturalistic lighting in the remainder of the film (see Figs. 20 and 21), thus heightening the documentary dimension of the film's aesthetic.

It appears then, that a further cinematic principle adhered to by Schanelec is to maintain a link with the 'real': in an interview featured on the DVD of her film *Mein langsames Leben*, Schanelec commented that she considers sound to play a critical role in this respect.⁴⁴ There is no extra-diegetic sound at any point in *Marseille*. Moreover, rather than recording dialogue separately and laying it over the original soundtrack in order to guarantee a 'clean' sound as is common practice in feature films – even films with a naturalistic approach – Schanelec prefers to use the original sound recording, saying 'Ich versuche, den Ton so wenig wie möglich zu manipulieren'.⁴⁵ This approach has the effect of changing the aural hierarchies that are usually accorded to the different sounds in a film scene: the noise that Sophie makes when tying her shoelace in a medium long shot is recorded using a microphone on her body, rendering it unexpectedly loud. This is equally true of the scene where she stands at her table, placing films into canisters – the clicks of their lids seem almost violent. Similarly, when Sophie and Pierre chat in the bar, their conversation is only just louder than the sound of other people talking and cars passing by outside, which has a flattening effect. It reduces the importance accorded to the protagonists in relation to their environment. The emphasis that Schanelec places on using the recording made in the moment when a scene was filmed seems to represent an attempt to reduce the levels of temporal and geographical abstraction that separate a spectator from the 'reality' on-screen. Schanelec has said that 'der Ton ist auch die Möglichkeit für mich, den Bezug zur Wirklichkeit zu halten'.⁴⁶ As in the scenes described above, this

⁴⁴ Carrara, *Das Kino der Angela Schanelec*.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

decision results at times in a strange disharmony between an image and the sound that viewers might expect to accompany it. In turn this undermines the impression of a seamless reality.

When considered alongside Schanelec's statements on the autonomy of the image, I read her insistence on maintaining a link to reality through sound, location and light as indicative of a kind of nostalgia for the photographic nature of film as advocated by Kracauer. In the introduction to the 1997 edition of *Theory of Film*, Miriam Hansen writes that Kracauer is preoccupied with the indexical quality of film, 'the trace of a material bond with the world represented (the camera having been there at a certain point in time, light rays having linked the object with the photochemical emulsion for fractions of a second)'.⁴⁷ Hansen goes on to say that digital technologies have rendered this perspective on film redundant in many ways, since post-production processes can now 'correct' virtually every element of the recorded image. The result is the loss of the 'traces of photographic, indexical contingency in the final product'.⁴⁸ Schanelec's cinematic principles described above suggest that she seeks to preserve these traces, inviting *Marseille* to be read as exhibiting a kind of Kracauerian realism: this realism is not concerned with documenting reality 'as it is', but rather with the photographic qualities of film as a record of time and space. For Kracauer, a realist film can be of any genre; the demand that it record and reveal physical reality should not be understood in a didactic sense. Rather, all 'creative efforts are in keeping with the cinematic approach as long as they benefit, in some way or another, the medium's substantive concern with our visible world'.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Miriam Hansen, 'Introduction', in Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. vii–xlv (p. viii).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. viii.

⁴⁹ Kracauer, *TF*, p. 39.

BENJAMIN'S AND KLUGE'S PROTESTS AGAINST THE ILLUSION OF 'REALITY'

Benjamin shares Kracauer's enthusiasm for the potential of film, and he, too, praises the *revealing and recording* properties of the medium. He admires Eisenstein not only for the Russian director's depiction of the worker as a political figure (see Chapter Two), but also for his use of the camera to bring to the screen that which could not be seen before. In an article that he wrote in defence of Russian cinema, Benjamin writes:

An sich selber sind diese Büros, möblierten Zimmer, Kneipen, Großstadtstraßen, Bahnhöfe und Fabriken häßlich, unfäßlich, hoffnungslos traurig. Vielmehr: sie waren und sie schienen so, bis der Film war. Er hat dann diese ganze Kerkerwelt mit dem Dynamit der Zehntelsekunden gesprengt, so daß nun zwischen ihren weitverstreuten Trümmern wir weite, abenteuerliche Reisen unternehmen.⁵⁰

These sentences reappear in Benjamin's *Kunstwerk* essay – identically in the second version and slightly altered in the third version. In both versions, Benjamin then goes on to elaborate on the revealing potential of the camera. In the second version, for example, Benjamin writes:

die mannigfachen Aspekte, die die Aufnahmeapparatur der Wirklichkeit abgewinnen kann, liegen zum großen Teile nur außerhalb eines normalen Spektrums der Sinneswahrnehmungen.⁵¹

Indeed, Kracauer shares Benjamin's argument concerning the camera's capacity to capture 'things normally unseen' (Kracauer) rather than vice-versa, given that it is Kracauer who paraphrases Benjamin in *Theory of Film* twenty-four years later.⁵² Despite

⁵⁰ Walter Benjamin, 'Erwiderung an Oscar A. H. Schmitz' (1927), in *GS* 2, pp. 747–755, (p. 752)

⁵¹ Walter Benjamin, 'Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit' (second version), in *GS* 7, 350–384 (p. 376).

⁵² Kracauer writes: 'Such images blow up our environment in a double sense: they enlarge it literally; and in doing so, they blast the prison of conventional reality, opening up expanses which we have explored at best in dreams before'. Kracauer cites the first, French version of the *Kunstwerk* essay in *TF*, p. 48.

their shared underlying belief that the technological possibilities of new media – the revealing function of the camera, for example – should be used to political ends, there are some fundamental differences in the way that Benjamin and Kracauer conceive of the relationship between film and reality. In the *Kunstwerk* essay, Benjamin writes:

*Im Filmatelier ist die Apparatur derart tief in die Wirklichkeit eingedrungen, daß deren reiner, vom Fremdkörper der Apparatur freier Aspekt das Ergebnis einer besonderen Prozedur, nämlich der Aufnahme durch den eigens eingestellten photographischen Apparat und ihrer Montierung mit anderen Aufnahmen von der gleichen Art ist. Der apparatfreie Aspekt der Realität ist hier zu ihrem künstlichsten geworden und der Anblick der unmittelbaren Wirklichkeit zur blauen Blume im Land der Technik.*⁵³

Whilst for Kracauer, the camera has to ‘penetrate’ reality in a way that satisfactorily delivers a ‘pure’ representation of the material world in film,⁵⁴ Benjamin declares that the film *has already penetrated reality*. Benjamin comments here on how film on the one hand offers the viewer the most unmediated impression of reality (‘der apparatfreie Aspekt der Realität’), yet the immediacy of reality that film purports to offer is actually the height of artifice. Miriam Hansen interprets Benjamin’s reference to the ‘blue flower’ as more than the acknowledgement that any attempt to ‘capture’ reality is doomed to fail, given that it represents ‘the unattainable object of the romantic quest, the incarnation of desire’.⁵⁵ She reads the above passage as follows:

the reality conveyed by the cinematic apparatus is no more and no less phantasmagoric than the ‘natural’ phenomena of the commodity world it endlessly replicates; and Benjamin knew all too well that the primary objective of capitalist film practice was to perpetuate that mythical chain of mirrors. Therefore, if film were to have a critical, cognitive function, it had to disrupt that chain and assume the task of all politicized art, as Buck-Morss paraphrases

⁵³ Walter Benjamin, ‘Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit’, in *GS* 1, pp. 471–508 (p. 495). Emphasis in original.

⁵⁴ ‘We cannot hope to embrace reality unless we penetrate its lowest layers’, writes Kracauer in *TF*, p. 298.

⁵⁵ Miriam Hansen, ‘Benjamin, Cinema and Experience: “The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology”’, *New German Critique*, 40 (1987), 179–224, (p. 204).

the argument of the Artwork Essay: ‘not to duplicate the illusion as real, but to interpret reality as itself illusion’.⁵⁶

Thus the core difference between the two thinkers’ conceptualisation of the relationship between film and reality may be summarised as follows: Kracauer places his faith in physical reality and the capacity of film to locate it; Benjamin considers it the task of film to destabilise the very notion of a single objective truth called ‘reality’.

Alexander Kluge advocates methods of engaging with reality using film that appear to be a continuation of Benjamin’s trajectory of thought. Kluge fundamentally rejects the idea of a kind of ‘seamless reality’ as a suitable mode of engaging with reality, since this approach would fail to acknowledge the constructed nature of its own existence and forecloses the involvement of the viewer in shaping reality. To the question, ‘Ist es möglich, einen realistischen Film zu machen und gleichzeitig die Illusion des Films zu behalten?’, Kluge answers with a resolute ‘Nein, kann man nicht’.⁵⁷ He compares a film in which both director and audience disappear – the classic self-contained illusionary film – to a pair of glasses that attempts to direct our focus on to something that claims to be real. Yet the glasses are faulty (‘unfunktionell’⁵⁸) and do not serve the interests of those looking. For the ‘reality’ captured by the camera in a film purporting to be ‘realist’ is superficial, a mere scratch on the surface of history. In alignment with Benjamin’s assertion that reality itself is the height of artifice, Kluge considers the ‘reality’ presented by mainstream media as plagued by ‘räuberische Parasiten, absichtsvolle Geister’⁵⁹ that serve to ‘perpetuate that mythical chain of mirrors’, referred to by Hansen.

Kluge’s conception of the realistic film is thus one that takes into account the subjective and objective impulses that constitute what we call ‘reality’, one in which ‘the

⁵⁶ Hansen, ‘Benjamin, Cinema and Experience’, p. 204.

⁵⁷ Author interview with Alexander Kluge, May 2014.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

labour of production and the film's reception meet on common ground'.⁶⁰ This is dependent on two key factors: firstly, the author must make his or her subjectivity visible so as not to unconsciously lay claim to an absolute authority (transparency), which may be mistaken for 'reality' or 'truth' by the viewer. Secondly, the film must find a form that involves rather than excludes the viewer as producer of meaning. Montage therefore plays a critical role in Kluge's cinematic engagement with reality. As Wenzel writes:

Montage incorporates the process that allows film to open itself, in an emphatic sense, to the multitude of materials and signs from which historical reality is constituted. [...] All kinds of signifying materials, already freighted with meaning from other contexts, are incorporated by Kluge into his films. In this model, the author's role in arranging the material cannot be overlooked, even as he simultaneously disappears into the textual montage, since he makes no attempt to homogenise the assembled signifying materials into a univocal discourse of truth.⁶¹

Thus Kluge adopts a radical approach to realist form: the textual montage is intended to alienate the viewer and reject any pretence of an invisible, omniscient author, a technique that has an unmistakably Brechtian hue. Further, he demands more than the kind of fragmentation I discuss in Chapter Four: his theory is driven by the Marxist imperative of making reality visible as a moment that is shaped by generations of past labourers: 'Es muß möglich sein, die Realität als die geschichtliche Fiktion, die sie ist, auch darzustellen'.⁶²

Haneke's early work, particularly the films I mention in Chapter Four, employ a Klugerian form at times; as I argue, the Austrian director's incorporation of newsreel footage and photographs in *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls* and in *Code Inconnu* suggests an interrogation of the 'reality-text'. Haneke represents an exception – few contemporary filmmakers who employ the kind of formal devices outlined above do so in

⁶⁰ Eike Friedrich Wenzel, 'Construction Site Film: Kluge's Idea of Realism and His Short Films' in *Alexander Kluge: Raw Materials for the Imagination*, ed. by Tara Forrest (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), pp. 173–190 (p. 177).

⁶¹ Wenzel, p. 180.

⁶² Alexander Kluge, 'Die schärfste Ideologie: daß die Realität sich auf ihren realistischen Charakter beruft', in Klaus Eder and Alexander Kluge, *Ulmer Dramaturgien: Reibungsverluste* (Munich: Hanser, 1980), pp. 119–125 (p. 119).

films that are produced for cinema release. There is, however, a second, less radical element to Kluge's theory of realism, something that Benjamin, too, advocates: a narrative emphasis on the representation of the authentic experience of the everyman and -woman in the ways outlined in Chapter Two. Whilst the depiction of the working classes ('das Proletariat') is an integral part of Kluge's critique, Negt and Kluge refer to the 'breite Erfahrungsgehalte der Wirklichkeit' that the dominant, (pseudo-) public sphere neglects.⁶³ These include

substantial social groups, such as workers, women, servants, as well as vital social issues, such as the material conditions of production and reproduction, including sexuality and childrearing – [...] any difference that cannot be assimilated, rationalized, and subsumed.⁶⁴

Thus a further key element of Kluge's 'realistische Methode' is the addressing of subjects that are part of the broad horizon of public experience. This is an idea that I will now develop in an examination of two contemporary German-language films: Andreas Dresen's *Halt auf freier Strecke* (2011) and Gerhard Friedl's *Hat Wolff von Amerongen Konkursdelikte begangen?* (2004). They are analysed in the light of those two interrelated strands of Benjamin's and Kluge's theories pertaining to cinematic realism.

'INS HERZ DER GESELLSCHAFT':

ANDREAS DRESEN'S REALISM IN *HALT AUF FREIER STRECKE*

Of all the directors I look at in this thesis, Andreas Dresen is the most commercially successful in his home country as multiple nominee and winner of the German Critics'

⁶³ Alexander Kluge, 'Fünfmal Realismus', in Eder and Kluge, pp. 146–147 (p. 147).

⁶⁴ Miriam Hansen, 'Foreword', in Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. ix–xlix (pp. xxvii–xxviii).

Association prize, the German Film Prize and the Berlin International Film Festival.⁶⁵

Unlike many directors with an East German film education, he managed successfully to adapt to the non-state-controlled landscape of film production, a fact that may be attributed to the fall of the Wall coinciding with the beginning of his filmmaking career.⁶⁶

Marco Abel comments that:

[Dresen] simply had less ballast to throw off and was thus better positioned to carve out a niche for his peculiar brand of filmmaking – one that bridges the humanist, neo-realist tradition of many GDR films on one hand and the commercial, entertainment-oriented impulses valued by a market-driven film production systems on the other.⁶⁷

Indeed, though critics have suggested that his work be considered alongside the Dogme 95 collective, his exploration of working-class milieus using a distinctive blend of drama and black comedy distinguishes the director from his contemporaries in Germany.⁶⁸ Though his body of his work comprises mostly fiction films, Dresen has also made a number of documentary films, and he spent six years working in television between his first and second feature films for cinema release (*Stilles Land*, 1992, and *Nachtgestalten*, 1999). Andreas Dresen is a director who shares Kluge's concerns relating to the responsibility of the media to offer the public quality output: 'I think people watching television deserve that what television offers them is decent and not simply trash'.⁶⁹ By considering the director's most recent cinema release, *Halt auf freier Strecke*, I show how Dresen's conception of filmic

⁶⁵ Andreas Dresen won the 'Best Feature Film' award at the German Critics' Award for *Nachtgestalten* (1999) and *Halbe Treppe* (2003), and was nominated for 'Best directorial achievement' for *Nachtgestalten*, *Halbe Treppe*, *Wolke Neun* (2009) and *Halt auf freier Strecke* (2011), and won the category for the latter two films. *Nachtgestalten* and *Halbe Treppe* were also nominated in the Competition section of the Berlin International Film Festival.

⁶⁶ Marco Abel, "'There is no Authenticity in the Cinema!': An Interview with Andreas Dresen", *senses of cinema*, 50 (2009), <http://sensesofcinema.com/2009/50/andreas-dresen-interview/#6> [accessed May 2014].

⁶⁷ Abel, "'There is no Authenticity in the Cinema!'".

⁶⁸ See Paul Cooke and Chris Homewood, 'Introduction: Beyond the cinema of consensus? New directions in German cinema from 2000', in *New Directions in German Cinema*, ed. by Paul Cooke and Chris Homewood (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), p. 17.

⁶⁹ Abel, "'There is no Authenticity in the Cinema!'".

realism – discernible in the stance he adopts towards viewers and his desire to tell stories intersubjectively – effectively broadens the scope of public experience depicted on-screen in a way that can be productively aligned with Kluge’s texts on the counter-public sphere (‘Gegenöffentlichkeit’). In terms of form, however, Dresen has indirectly distanced himself from Kluge:

Die Realität darf nicht politisch-didaktisch serviert werden, die Geschichten müssen leinwandtauglich sein und den Zuschauer zu einer emotionalen Achterbahnfahrt einladen. Wir dürfen nicht den Fehler des Neuen Deutschen Films wiederholen und in eine belehrende Schiene abrutschen.⁷⁰

The following section examines the strategies employed by the director to balance what I consider to be Klugerian political tendencies in terms of content with a more general concern for ‘Leinwandtauglichkeit’.

Unlike *Marseille*, *Halt auf freier Strecke* has a coherent and straightforward narrative curve: it portrays a family coping with the deteriorating health of the terminally ill father, Frank Lange (Milan Peschel), from the diagnosis of his untreatable brain tumour, to his death three months later. The progression of the illness as his tumour grows is signified by different markers: his physiological decline from having a normal, functioning body to a state of complete dependency is accompanied by various psychological stages, from mild disorientation and confusion, aggression and sadness to a general state of incapacity, interspersed with moments of intellectual clarity; we see his relationships with his wife and children transform as they adjust to Frank’s condition; and the seasons change from autumn to winter as the piles of leaves are replaced by frost, then snow. Despite the subject matter, the film is not sentimental: Frank’s diagnosis does not prompt profound reflections on his life or the resolution of previously insurmountable grievances. His illness is at times a burden for those around him as they struggle to perform the more mundane tasks of day-to-day life. Here, death features not as a narrative marker or a device by which the gravity

⁷⁰ Margret Köhler, ‘Undogmatisch: Interview mit Andreas Dresen zu “Nachtgestalten”’, *film-dienst*, 16 (1999), 46–47 (p. 47).

of a situation is measured, but rather as the story itself. Dresen has said that the film originated in conversations with friends about the lack of films depicting the ‘everyday’ reality of coping with the death of a loved one:

Was ich vor allen Dingen vermisst habe in den meisten Filmen, die ich geschaut habe, war eine alltägliche Darstellung: Was bedeutet Sterben eines lieben Menschen in einer Familie für alle Beteiligten, wirklich? *Und zwar ohne dramaturgische Ausflüchte*. In den meisten Filmen wird der Tod als dramaturgisches Mittel benutzt für andere Konstruktionen. [...] Das lenkt ab vom eigentlichen Hauptthema oder benutzt es für etwas anderes. Es wird nirgendwo so viel gestorben wie auf den Leinwänden, und so anschaulich. [...] Im Kino können Hunderte von Leuten zu Tode kommen und geht man fröhlich Popcorn essend raus. Wir dachten, wir müssen davon so erzählen, wie es viele Menschen erleben, die einen nahen Verwandten, Freund, ihre Eltern verlieren, und die die sich widersprechenden Gefühle dabei wirklich ernst nehmen.⁷¹

Like Schanelec, Dresen rejects the exploitation of an event for dramaturgical purposes, however their approaches differ significantly. Whilst Schanelec omits the depiction of Sophie’s accident because she felt unable to escape cinematic cliché,⁷² Dresen tackles death head-on, making it the sole focus of the 90-minute film. Echoing Kluge’s accusation that the media turn spectators into entrepreneurs, I read the above statement as an implicit critique of a cinema that encourages its viewers to consume the images as they do their popcorn. It seems that Dresen’s antidote to this mode of spectatorship is to offer viewers an ‘everyday’ portrayal of death that may approximate their own experiences. As advocated by Kluge, then, there appears to be a programmatic element to this shift from private to public in the making of *Halt auf freier Strecke*. It is a commitment to bringing a different version of death to the cinema screen as a counter to the dominant cinematic discourse, a general agreement not to present a subject for ‘consumption’.

⁷¹ Interview with Andreas Dresen included on *Halt auf freier Strecke*, dir. by Andreas Dresen (Pandora edition, 2011). Emphasis mine.

⁷² Carrara, *Das Kino der Angela Schanelec*.

Dresen structures the form and content of his film in order to fold the experience of death into a story that might ring true for audiences. The narrative is based on the dozens of interviews that Dresen carried out when researching for the film. Many of the scenes are reconstructions of incidents recounted by interviewees, for example when Frank relieves himself in his daughter's room, unable to find the toilet, or when Frank's wife, Simone (Steffi Kühnert), tells the care assistant that she wishes that Frank would die in his sleep. From these interviews, Dresen also extracted and included in the film topics that recurred in people's experiences of dealing with the death of loved ones, for example the abstract nature of illness for children, as well as the process of negotiating which services a health insurance provider will pay for.⁷³ The characters are constructed to be likeable and rounded through the inclusion of small details such as Simone and her mother's penchant for eggnog, Lilli's extra-curricular diving activities, the silly jokes that Frank tells, and Mika's hankering after his father's iPhone. Thus, in contrast to *Marseille*, viewers are encouraged to identify with – and emotionally invest in – these characters, a point that is underscored by the camerawork, to which I return below. The characters are firmly grounded in a working-class milieu that is identifiable by the couple's blue-collar jobs and their modest new house, which is intended to show that, in Dresen's words, 'Hier haben sich kleine Leute einen Lebenstraum erfüllt'.⁷⁴ It is a family that cannot afford to go on an expensive holiday, so instead travels to the 'Tropical Islands' indoor holiday resort in Brandenburg as a final excursion before Frank becomes completely immobile. Unlike the non-places in *Marseille*, there is an emphasis on local identities, on the family, and on specific, familiar locations in *Halt auf freier Strecke*.

The commitment to representing real experiences extends to Dresen's working methods, too. Whilst Schanelec meticulously scripts her dialogue down to the last comma,⁷⁵ Dresen dictates situations and events that are to happen over the course of a

⁷³ Dresen, audio commentary to *Halt auf freier Strecke*.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Carrara, *Das Kino der Angela Schanelec*.

scene (in the form of a ‘Dreizeiler’⁷⁶) and then allows his actors to improvise different versions of the same scene. As they progress through different takes, decisions are made relating to which movements, actions or dialogue lines work best, so that the final takes are more ‘staged’ than the initial attempts. The final result is thus a series of shots sewn together from the raw, improvised material and the staged versions that developed over the course of the shooting. Though Dresen ultimately remains in control of the overall narrative progression in the film, the actual execution – how the characters move from the start of one scene to its end – is a ‘Prozess des gemeinsamen Suchens’, according to the director.⁷⁷ Speaking about this processual aspect to the work, Dresen comments: ‘ich habe oft die Erfahrung gemacht, dass die Erfahrung einer Gruppe von Leuten, und die Fantasie einer Gruppe von Leuten viel reicher ist als meine eigene’.⁷⁸ The result of this collaborative approach is a film in which the actors draw upon their real experiences in order to respond to situational and dialogic prompts in a convincing manner. Moreover, it demonstrates that Dresen is looking to create a work of art that is in many ways intersubjective: whilst he is meticulous in creating the conditions for production, he simultaneously denies sole authorship through his interest in representing others’ lived experiences, his preference for writing together with a scriptwriter, and his emphasis on teamwork during production.⁷⁹

This link to the ‘real’ is further emphasised by the composition of cast members: whilst the core ensemble – Frank and Simone, their parents, Frank’s colleague and ex-girlfriend – is composed of professional actors, all of the healthcare professionals and therapists, the funeral director, and the man from the insurance company are lay actors playing themselves. The result is an at times peculiar crossover between fiction and reality: in the opening scene, for example, Frank and Simone sit in the real office of Dr. Uwe Träger, Chief Neurosurgeon at a Neurosurgery Clinic in Potsdam, who carries out real

⁷⁶ Marcus Siebert, ‘Interview mit Andreas Dresen’, in Börner, Heisenberg, Hochhäusler and Wackerbarth, pp. 61–90 (p. 76).

⁷⁷ Dresen interview on *Halt auf freier Strecke*.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Siebert, ‘Interview mit Andreas Dresen’, p. 72, p. 80.

conversations of this nature three or four times a week. Referring to the scan of a real patient's brain tumour, the doctor elaborates on the diagnosis for the couple. Reflecting on the filming process, Träger has said:

Es war ein Gespräch in höchster Wachheit, höchster Konzentration. Ich habe die Kamera komplett vergessen, es gab auch keine Scheinwerfer, es war überhaupt nichts verändert in diesem Raum.⁸⁰

Further, the doctor receives a call from his operation coordinator whilst the cameras are rolling, with the effect that a slice of the real day-to-day operation of the clinic is inserted into the middle of this fictional scene. Indeed, it seems that Dresen goes out of his way to craft instances where real life and fiction intersect: in a scene where Frank is disoriented and tries to cross a busy road, the shot of a passer-by stopping to help him across is filmed using a hidden camera; the image of a neighbour trying to coax her cat out of her tree is real footage of the actual neighbour of the house in which the film was shot – ‘das ist tatsächlich ein bisschen Dokumentarfilm’, says Dresen.⁸¹ Similarly, the toolshed and screw boxes that Frank labels for Simone are on loan from a woman who the director interviewed in preparation for the film, whose husband did the same for her before dying of a brain tumour. On the use of the original toolshed in the film, Dresen says, ‘Wir fanden das [...] eine schöne Erinnerung an diesen Menschen’.⁸²

There are therefore a number of concurrent strategies involved in Dresen's construction of this ‘everyday’ portrayal of death: on an ideational level, there are the references to reality that are invisible to the cinemagoer, such as the real toolshed and the reconstruction of real experiences shared by interviewees. On a narrative level, the extensive research, character development and improvised dialogue and gestures help create a storyline that seems both plausible and authentic. The use of lay actors in the role

⁸⁰ Booklet accompanying DVD of *Halt auf freier Strecke*, dir. by Andreas Dresen (Pandora edition, 2011).

⁸¹ Dresen, audio commentary to *Halt auf freier Strecke*.

⁸² Ibid.

of the doctors, therapists and other service providers adds a further dimension to the film, or a different ‘shade’, as Dresen says: ‘Ich finde immer, wenn Leute etwas tun, was sie aus ihrem Alltag kennen, bringt das andere Töne’.⁸³ I would like to refer to Kluge, here, in his consideration of the function that lay actors perform in constructing film reality:

Das was man eine ‘Film-Realität’ nennt [...], diese Illusionswirkung des Kinos, die beruht auf einer vorhergehenden Verabredung zwischen den Zuschauern und der Filmindustrie, was ‘real’ sei. Dazu gehört eine bestimmte Fähigkeit, die ein Schauspieler [hat], menschliche Charaktere zu glätten. Plausibel zu machen. Elegant zu halten. In “patterns” zu verwandeln. Ein realer Mensch würde immerzu gegen dieses Gesetz, gegen diese Vereinbarung verstoßen. So daß es ein Zuschauer sofort, wenn Laien im Film tätig sind, merkt, das ist nicht real, das ist Film. Allerdings würde man gleichzeitig den Eindruck haben, das sind reale Menschen. Ich könnte sie anfassen. Ich könnte ins Filmbild hineingehen. Das ist was Gutes.⁸⁴

According to Kluge, lay actors are recorded in a kind of limbo, neither acting in accordance with the regulations concerning the depiction of ‘real’ on film, nor able to behave as they would in a real situation because of the technical limitations imposed on them (i.e. the need to stand in a certain way, face a certain direction, guide the conversation on a particular course). The use of lay actors is for Kluge, then, a productive way of reminding viewers of the illusionary nature of film, a Brechtian device that serves to draw attention to the constructed nature of the image. Whilst this distinction between ‘real’ actors and lay actors is far less pronounced in *Halt auf freier Strecke* than Kluge claims it to be in general, his assertion of difference is useful: there is a small but detectable gap, I suggest, between the character of Frank and the men who come to deliver his new bed, or between Frank and the care assistant who washes his body and cleans his teeth. This is a gap that delineates Frank as the actor Milan Peschel, and the men and care assistant as real people, a gap that is identifiable in their overly conscious non-acknowledgement of the camera, or in their physical stiffness, perhaps (Fig. 22). These characters stand out as visitors to the

⁸³ Dresen, audio commentary to *Halt auf freier Strecke*.

⁸⁴ Author interview with Alexander Kluge, May 2014.

hermetically sealed reality that the film constructs, thereby drawing attention to this reality as 'Film-Realität'.

Dresen's realism is one that acknowledges itself as a fiction, albeit in a less radical form than that advocated by Kluge. There are moments in which the logic of the narrative is broken and where the 'seamless reality' is shattered. Frank's iPhone begins as a toy that he uses to record a diary of his experiences as his health deteriorates. The grainy images of Frank staring directly into the camera have a Brechtian effect, reminding us that we are not looking through a window at a real family, but instead are watching a sequence of images. In Klugerian terms, our focus is directed towards the glasses through which we are used to looking. The sense of alienation is only heightened once we realise that there comes a point where the 'Frank' on the iPhone is independent of the Frank lying in bed, whose physical self is no longer capable of this technological mode of self-expression. When Frank's body is too weak to get up, his alter ego takes his iPhone and visits his sleeping children in their bedrooms, stroking their hair, or recounts tales from his childhood. A further metaphysical layer to the film is the personification of Frank's tumour in the form of the actor Thorsten Mertin. Frank catches his tumour being interviewed on the 'Harald Schmidt Show' on television, speaking about the sway he has over Frank's physical and psychological wellbeing. His tumour appears in personified form throughout the film, acting as an external manifestation of Frank's deterioration. These magical realist elements flow from Dresen's notion that realism does not have to be 'realistic', but should express a kind of truth:

Oft wird Realismus aber damit verwechselt, dass man ein 1:1 Abbild der Wirklichkeit geben sollte. Nach meinem Gefühl stimmt das nicht. Für mich beinhaltet Realismus durchaus die Möglichkeit zur Verfremdung, wenn man damit bei einer Form von Wahrheit ankommt, die ins Herz der Gesellschaft zielt und ins Herz der Menschen. Ich habe noch nie einen Film gemacht, der ein identifizierbares, authentisches Abbild der Welt liefert. Das geht auch gar nicht.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ David Lode, *Abenteuer Wirklichkeit: die Filme von Andreas Dresen* (Marburg: Schüren Verlag, 2009), p. 97.

In one interview about the film, Dresen says that the Harald Schmidt episodes serve to illustrate Frank's 'immer verrückter werdende Seele'.⁸⁶ It would seem, then, that Dresen's focus is on achieving a truth at the same time that he undermines impressions of a seamless, *authentic* realism.

We might then identify a kind of push-pull mechanism at work, whereby formally disruptive devices are combined with more conventional filmic traditions, resulting in a film that is realist in the sense that it is truthful, as well as being 'leinwandtauglich'. Dresen has commented that his intention was similar in *Halbe Treppe* (2002):

Film is a big lie and at times I am interested in calling attention to this fact. We did this explicitly in 'Grill Point'. The film has such a strong documentary feeling that, at times, we simply wanted to lift the curtain to tell the audience that we've been deceiving them the whole time – but, now that they know this, they can keep watching.⁸⁷

There are more subtle ways that Dresen breaks with convention and 'lifts the curtain', too. He has spoken about the importance of omitting information and allowing viewers to 'fill in the gaps' themselves, referring specifically to the scene in which Simone and Frank have sex.⁸⁸ The intimate scene, framed in close-up and medium-close up shots, ends with a shot of the top of their heads over the back of the bed frame – we are forced to look *with* them rather than *at* them, as we might expect. There are also instances where the cinematography is unconventional, for example in the doctor's office when Frank and Simone are given the initial diagnosis. The scene begins with an image of the brain scan, and we see Dr Träger's mouse moving over sections of the photograph as he explains where the tumour is located and why it cannot be operated on. In accordance with what we would expect, we are then shown an image of the source of the voice – Dr Träger – in a

⁸⁶ Julia Pühringer, 'Im Kino die Wirklichkeit sehen', *Ray*, 2 (2012), 88–90 (p. 90).

⁸⁷ Abel, "There is no Authenticity in the Cinema!"

⁸⁸ Dresen, audio commentary to *Halt auf freier Strecke*.

medium shot, sitting behind his desk. The subsequent ‘reaction’ shot is that of Frank and Simone in medium close-up; Simone is in the foreground and slightly out of focus. As Dr Träger continues to speak, the camera remains fixed on the couple, registering the minutiae of their facial expressions (Fig. 23). Rather than cutting back to the doctor using the conventional shot/reverse shot method, we stay with the two of them and are forced to witness shocked silence – even as Dr. Träger proceeds to answer the phone and have a conversation – without being offered the momentary relief of the editor’s cut. This shot of the two figures lasts just over three minutes, and approximates the kind of ‘staring’ that I identified in *Marseille*. In Schanelec’s film, the effect on the viewer is to alienate him or her from the action on-screen. Here, however, one effect of this avoidance of a shot/reverse shot is to *intensify* the emotional connection of viewers with the characters, which is underscored by the close-up: we cannot help but notice how Simone’s eyes fill with water until she blinks and a tear rolls down her cheek, nor how Frank clenches his jaw and furrows his brow.

This clearly illustrates the formal balancing act that Dresen performs in *Halt auf freier Strecke*. In spite of the above examples of non-conventional formal devices employed to shatter our impression of a seamless reality, we are offered a predominantly conventional viewing experience. The narrative of this everyday portrayal of death, with its rounded characters with whom we are encouraged to identify, make the film ‘leinwandtauglich’ in a way that *Marseille* is not. Whilst the ‘curtain is lifted’, *Halt auf freier Strecke* is far removed from the radical form advocated by Benjamin and Kluge. The spectator is given much more than ‘raw materials for the imagination’ (Kluge): most of the time, we are rewarded with images that satisfy our viewing expectations. Thus I would suggest that the film is Klugerian in content more than in form.

Dresen contributes to a counter-public sphere not only with his truthful depiction of death, but also in his emphasis on authentic experience in other realms. He renders *work* visible. *Halt auf freier Strecke* not only shows the gritty day-to-day tasks involved in caring for

a dying person; there are also sequences showing Simone and Frank's jobs as a tram driver and worker in a packing factory, respectively. Though these serve the broader task of placing the characters in context, the duration of the individual scenes stands out. The static camera is fixed on Frank for ten seconds as he guides an extendable conveyor belt backwards, for example; and we look out through the windscreen of the tram that Simone is driving for ten seconds, before the film cuts to a shot of Simone's profile for a further 15 seconds. No remarkable event happens in these scenes, but they carry more emphasis than would be necessary for the sake of characterisation. In the spirit of Kluge's demand to shift the balance of the private and the public on-screen, Dresen comments in the audio commentary to the film: 'Ich glaube, dass die Arbeitswelt doch eine entscheidende Rolle im Leben der Menschen spielt, und viel zu selten im Film gezeigt wird'.⁸⁹ Thus, there appears to be a clear drive on the part of the director to voice stories that are otherwise absent in the landscape of contemporary German-language cinema. From his treatment of love and sex in old age (*Wolke Neun*, 2008), marginalised figures (*Nachtgestalten*, 1997), and alternative social realities (*Die Polizistin*, 2000), Dresen effectively contributes to the broadening of the scope of experience brought to German-speaking audiences.

RADICAL REALISM IN GERHARD FRIEDL'S

HAT WOLFF VON AMERONGEN KONKURSDELIKTE BEGANGEN?

As outlined above, Benjamin and Kluge are interested in films that not only reject or disrupt the impression of a seamless reality, but which also seek to reveal the dense layers of history – the multiple, alternate, *counter*-realities – that constitute any image that lays claim to objectivity. Like *Halt auf freier Strecke*, Gerhard Friedl's *Hat Wolff von Amerongen Konkursdelikte begangen?* would also merit consideration as a twenty-first-century worker film. We are shown tens of shots of different working environments in France and Germany:

⁸⁹ Dresen, audio commentary to *Halt auf freier Strecke*.

textile factories, a helicopter workshop, different kinds of heavy machinery, generic office spaces, and numerous images of industrial landscapes. Yet, remarkably, the figure of the worker is conspicuously absent: the voiceover gives an account of selected business ventures and takeovers by twentieth-century industrialists. As Harun Farocki remarked when introducing the film as part of a Friedl retrospective, the film does more than critique the ‘Selbstdarstellung der Deutschen mit ihrer großartigen Industriegeschichte’.⁹⁰ For what distinguishes *Wolff von Amerongen* is the film’s montage and the remarkable relationship it builds between sound and image. In light of Kluge’s assertion that it must be possible to represent reality as a historical fiction, this film offers a third, more radical example of filmic realism in the landscape of German-language cinema.

After beginning his studies in Philosophy at the University of Vienna, Gerhard Friedl switched to Munich’s *Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen* (HFF), where he was part of a group that distanced itself from the prevailing trend of the school, known at the time for its orientation towards commercial filmmaking, or, as Farocki says, ‘Produzentenfilme’ (as opposed to ‘Autorenfilme’).⁹¹ Friedl is credited as the director of only three films, two of which he made at the HFF. He was awarded the prize for the Best German Documentary Film by the German Critics’ Association in 1997 for the first, a short film entitled *Knittelfeld – Stadt ohne Geschichte* (1997). The second film and focus of this chapter, *Hat Wolff von Amerongen Konkursdelikte begangen?*, was his graduate film, and this won several documentary film awards, including the prize for the Best Documentary Film awarded by the Goethe Institute in 2004.⁹² This resulted in its translation into eight languages and its distribution worldwide. The third film for which Friedl is accredited as director is a short film, ‘Shedding Details’ (2009) that he made during an artists’ residency in the Villa Aurora in Los Angeles, together with video artist Laura Horelli in the year that he died.

⁹⁰ Harun Farocki, ‘Im Andenken an Gerhard Friedl’, spoken introduction to a Friedl Retrospective at the Österreichisches Filmmuseum on 29 September 2009, temporary access to video granted by the Filmmuseum, May 2014.

⁹¹ Farocki, ‘Im Andenken an Gerhard Friedl’.

⁹² ‘Gerhard Benedikt Friedl’ entry on dok.at <<http://dok.at/person/gerhard-benedikt-friedl/>> [accessed May 2014]

Friedl's oeuvre remains peripheral, perhaps because it is difficult to categorise: he does not belong to a particular 'school' of filmmaking like Schanelec, nor do his films feature an ensemble of actors that situate him within a particular milieu, like Dresen. Both *Knittelfeld* and *Wolff von Amerongen* have won prizes in 'short film' categories, yet their length is unconventional for this grouping: thirty-four minutes and seventy-three minutes respectively. They are not typical documentary films in terms of form: neither of them features talking heads nor is variety of sources intended to corroborate the evidence presented. Their classification as documentary serves to set them apart from feature films, but reveals little else. As Silvia Hallensleben comments in her review of *Wolff von Amerongen* in *epd Film*, Friedl's success in the documentary film genre is useful in terms of distribution, but it is his winning the 'Preis für Innovatives Kino auf der Diagonale' at the Graz Film Festival that is most telling about the director's work.⁹³ In the following section, I show how Friedl's film is innovative precisely because it calls into question the very notion of documentary, indeed that it looks to protest against the 'text of reality'⁹⁴ that documentary films claim to represent.

An unidentified male German voice acts as a narrator of the film. In a factual tone, he weaves together details from the professional and private lives of well-known German male industrialists over the course of the twentieth century. Some of the names are more familiar than others – Flick, Daimler-Benz, Oetker all feature in the film. The first protagonist and starting-point of the 'story' is Alfons Müller Wipperfurth. The narrator begins:

Alfons Müller Wipperfurth ist Textilindustrieller. Alfons Müller Wipperfurth beginnt 1931 mit sieben Arbeitern und drei Nähmaschinen. Er verkauft die Ware vor Werkstoren, von der Ladefläche herab. Später hat er für jede seiner

⁹³ Silvia Hallensleben, 'Hat Wolff von Amerongen Konkursdelikte begangen? Reflexiver Dokumentarfilm über Kapital und Wirtschaft', *epd Film*, 3 (2006), 44.

⁹⁴ Wenzel, p. 180.

Filialen einen je eigenen Schlüssel. Nach Dienstschluss kommt er in die Verkaufsräume. Ist er unzufrieden, hinterlässt er eine Visitenkarte.⁹⁵

The narrator switches from one character to the next by means of a personal connection: we move from Alfons Müller-Wipperfurth to his accountant, Adolf Münemann, who lends money to Hugo Stinnes jr., and so on. One businessman leads to the next, who leads to the next, in a web of money-lending, business takeovers, stock-buying and -selling, tax evasion and bankruptcy fraud. The authorial voice is unrelenting: the lack of pauses or variation in tone over the full seventy-three minutes make it difficult to follow, as do the chronological jumps as a new thread begins in a different decade. It demands a high degree of concentration – and will – on the part of the viewer to engage with the narrative twists and turns. The ‘factual’ information relating to the figures’ industrial investments is interspersed with a selection of anecdotes relating to their health, idiosyncrasies, and personal lives. For example:

In den frühen 50er Jahren werden die Konzernreste des Vaters in der Familie aufgeteilt. Einerseits Hugo Stinnes jr., andererseits Bruder Otto und Mutter Cläre. Sie alle haben Hörgeräte.

And:

Im Schloß von Ries logieren Politiker. Flicks Töchter kommen mit dem Hubschrauber zur Jagd. Ries ist depressiv. Er besitzt Waffen.

The style of the stories resembles the *faits divers* of a local newspaper; concrete statements are interwoven with speculative comments such as ‘[Strauss] vertraut seinem Freund Karl-Heinz Schreiber’. The resulting combination of factual and farcical assertions has the effect of the latter calling the former into question. The tone underscores the implication that every one of the named businessmen is tainted by corruption and foul play, if not directly,

⁹⁵ All quotations from the film refer to *Hat Wolff von Amerongen Konkursdelikte begangen?*, dir. by Gerhard Friedl (Der Österreichische Film: Edition der Standard, 2004).

then by association. The narrator's comment that 'Wolff von Amerongen profitiert an den Aktien enteigneter Juden' is a moment in which the political undercurrent of the film finds a fissure through which to escape, and the critique of the link between capital and politics in Germany becomes clear.

It is worth briefly noting some parallels between this mode of narration and Kluge's writing style in his collections of stories. Andreas Huyssen describes how a reader is likely to react with 'frustration and irritation' to Kluge's literary oeuvre:

All traditional notions of narration – such as plot, character, action – are suspended, and one has great difficulty orienting oneself. The stories move in a very fast, shorthand style, and the figures are often just as much in a hurry, heading into dead ends or disaster.⁹⁶

Kluge's stories are intended to prompt the same involvement from their readers as his films do from their viewers: we are presented with 'construction sites' for the imagination in the form of fragments of prose, dialogue, 'documentary' observations, legal documents, and so on, featuring real and fictional characters from the past and the present. Consider the following excerpt from 'Lernprozesse mit tödlichem Ausgang', for example:

Ritterkreuzträger und Jagdflieger Teddi Kunzelmann muß umschulen, wird Ingenieur. 1956 schließt die Firma, auf der er sich jetzt ganz fest eingestellt hat. Teddi Kunzelmann wird Reporter. Bei einem Brückeneinsturz, den er noch fotografiert, verliert er beide Beine. Er paßt sich an den körperlichen Verlust an, wird Rechnungsführer in einer Großfirma. 1972 stellt diese Firma die Abrechnung auf Computer an.⁹⁷

As in *Wolff von Amerongen*, Kluge uses his telescope of twentieth-century history to focus on an individual: Friedl, too, repeats the full names of his protagonists, and the detached, matter-of-fact manner of relating of private and public information here is remarkably

⁹⁶ Andreas Huyssen, 'An Analytic Storyteller in the Course of Time', in *Alexander Kluge: Raw Materials for the Imagination*, ed. by Tara Forrest (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), pp. 271–282 (p. 272).

⁹⁷ Alexander Kluge, *Lernprozesse mit tödlichem Ausgang* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973), p. 5.

similar to Friedl's text. Huyssen positions Kluge's literary works in relation to other post-war German writing, and suggests that the form that the stories take can be read as a kind of anti-*Bildungsroman*, a reaction against the 'textual machine in which and through which bourgeois subjectivity constituted itself in history'.⁹⁸ Huyssen writes:

Kluge does not have a style qua individual, authorial language. Rather, he mimics the frozen languages of factual reportage and bureaucracy, of the protocol, the document, the official letter, the legal deposition, the chronicle, and so forth, and modifies them for his purposes, often through methods of logical extrapolation, ironic distance, satire or humour.⁹⁹

He continues:

One of Kluge's basic narrative strategies, in an age in which traditional narration is no longer adequate to capture the increasingly complex and abstract structures of contemporary reality, is to render the various language games that constitute social and political reality recognisable as such, to unfold their implications for domination and repression, and to explore their potential for protest and resistance.¹⁰⁰

Huyssen sees Kluge as tapping into the wide-ranging different discourses that constitute 'the German archive, its structures and its histories' in his writing, re-telling them and distorting them in order to show how they continue to permeate the present.¹⁰¹ We might consider the narrative of *Wolff von Amerongen* in similar terms: the narrator's tone is mocking, the characters' weaknesses are relished:

Hans Gerling gehört der gleichnamige, drittgrößte Versicherungskonzern der BRD. [...] Die Gebäude [des Konzerns] sind unterirdisch mit einander verbunden. Dort dürfen Fahrräder nicht abgestellt werden. Aufregungen lösen bei Gerling Druckgefühle hinter dem Brustbein aus.

⁹⁸ Huyssen, p. 273.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 274.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 275.

Friedl isolates one discourse in the German archive – that of twentieth-century industry – and picks it apart, drawing the viewer into a rabbit hole in which he or she can no longer distinguish between the real and unreal, thereby generating a protest against the ‘reality’ of the documentary form chosen by Friedl, as advocated by Kluge.¹⁰²

Just as Kluge’s short story volumes comprise page upon page of seemingly disconnected literary pieces that prevent reader identification, the visual structure of *Wolff von Amerongen* is made up of shot upon shot of seemingly disconnected documentary footage. The sound level of the recorded footage is kept at a minimum; we can hear the murmur of voices or the hum of traffic or machinery underneath the narrator, which becomes more prominent during pauses in the narrated text. The film not only shows places of production, but also rural landscapes, city streets, traffic junctions, train stations, military bases, shops, hospitals, and other public and non-domestic spaces from around the time of the film’s production in 2004. We do not see any landmarks, but there are several clues that the images are filmed urban and rural areas in European French- and German-speaking countries: the huge ‘Commerzbank’; the ‘Festspielhaus’ lettering that may be familiar to visitors to Salzburg; the font and colour of the street signage, the ‘Poissonerie’ sign in a supermarket; the ‘Total’ petrol station, and so on. The one landmark we are shown is a scaled-down version of Berlin’s Brandenburg Gate, which could be in a theme park anywhere where ‘Eis’ would be sold next to it. The signs indicating location are subtle. There is no geographical continuum between the shots of France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, and Luxembourg; the film cuts from a shot in a stock-market in a German city to the entrance to a car park in France, or from a French supermarket to a German industrial area, or from an *Autobahn* to an *autoroute*. As the narrator seamlessly links one industrialist to the next, all manner of European workplaces and public spaces are juxtaposed, inviting connections to be made.

¹⁰² Huyssen, p. 274. See also Helmut Heißenbüttel, ‘Der Text ist die Wahrheit. Zur Methode des Schriftstellers Alexander Kluge’, *Text + Kritik* 85/86, (1985), 2–8.

With some exceptions, the large majority of the shots are panning or tracking shots; the latter are filmed using a camera on the front of a moving vehicle as it drives through the streets of a city. This smoothes over the transition from one place to the next, creating a continuous movement that sustains the momentum of the film. Whereas *Marseille* also has a number of panning and tracking shots, they function differently in *Wolff von Amerongen*. In *Marseille*, the camera is used to mimic the gaze of an observer who is turning his or her head, whereas in Friedl's film, the movement appears more mechanical. It does not adjust to or focus on the human figures in the frame, whose presence seems incidental. In the grey office above the vaults, for example, the camera pans to the left as a man in a suit walks across the frame to the right (Fig. 24), preventing viewers from tracing his path. Friedl does not build any kind of character-based narrative through the images of the film.

In contrast to the narrative, which is focused solely on tales of 'human interest', the camera seems more interested in space than the people occupying it. Whilst *Marseille* establishes a gap between the spectator and the characters on-screen through the camera's 'staring',¹⁰³ the degree of alienation between viewer and image in *Wolff von Amerongen* is even greater. In one shot of a traffic junction in *Marseille*, the camera is static and Sophie is pictured in an extreme long shot (see Fig. 25). Compare this with a shot of a traffic junction in Friedl's film, where the tracking camera remains static for several seconds on a red light as pedestrians cross the road. Here, the people offer no point of connection for the viewer: they cross the frame in profile in a long shot, and we can barely see their faces (Fig. 26). Throughout the film, there is no single body on screen offered to the viewer for identification. The director thus refuses to address a semi-specific audience. As Huyssen says of Kluge, what Friedl offers viewers is an 'estranging glance' at Western European cities which are rendered devoid of individual subjectivities through the unsentimental gaze of the camera.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Marco Abel, 'Intensifying Life: The Cinema of the "Berlin School"'.
¹⁰⁴ Huyssen, p. 274.

The relationship between these two concurrent tracks – the narration of tales of crooked industrialists, and the stream of documentary footage – is characterised by a continual sense of disjuncture and disruption. Pierre Gras writes in *Cahiers du Cinéma*: ‘the spectator is thrown into a vertiginous kaleidoscope of images and sounds’.¹⁰⁵ There is a temporal disjuncture between the images of twenty-first century Western Europe and the stories being told about various German magnates from 1920 onwards. Whilst there is also, consequently, a thematic disjuncture given that we are not shown images of the industrialists, there is also a certain degree of correlation between what we hear and what we see. Instances when the narrative thematically relates to the image shown in a given moment recur throughout the film: for example, when the voiceover explains: ‘Münemann sagt, er habe sich vom Modell der Drehtüre inspirieren lassen’, we see a revolving door at the front of an airport and various people coming in and out. On another occasion, we hear that ‘Die Quandts haben an der Herstattbank Anteile’ as the camera remains fixed on a branch of the ‘Commerzbank’. There are also times when the link is weaker, for example when the narrator recounts how Harald Quandt crashes his plane on a mountain in Piémont, France, whilst the camera ascends a mountain on a moving vehicle, with expanses of sky dominating the frame (Fig. 27). Similarly, the story of August Thyssen’s funeral procession with horses is accompanied by a shot of a horse-drawn cart for tourists in front of a building site in an unidentifiable German or Austrian town. Here, there is a delay of several seconds, so that the narrator has already moved on to the next snippet of information by the time that the horses appear on screen. This kind of temporally delayed correlation between the text and image takes place frequently in the film, and may go unnoticed by viewers upon their first viewing of the film, giving the impression of no apparent link between the sound and image. There are indeed also instances where no clear connection exists, for example when we hear that ‘Fertiggerrichte, Tiefkühlpizzas und

¹⁰⁵ Pierre Gras, ‘Un film d’Allemagne’, *Cahiers du Cinéma* (2012), 81–82 (p. 81). Source: ‘Un vertigineux kaléidoscope d’images et de sons pour y plonger le spectateur’.

Torten kommen ins Sortiment' of the Oetker empire, whilst being shown a panning image of a casino next to a busy intersection.

Whilst there are frequent instances of a thematic link between the narration and the footage, then, they remain highly superficial: they merely gesture towards continuity rather than presenting an actual connection between the horse-drawn wagon and August Thyssen's funeral, for example. Farocki has commented on Friedl's montage technique, pointing towards what he calls '[die] Willkur der Verbindung von Wort und Bild':

Wir haben auch immer eine Lehrveranstaltung mit ihm hier im Raum gemacht, und beim Versuch, das zu analysieren, nach welchen Regeln sind die Bilder an Texte gefügt, kommt nicht so viel raus, weil das weniger um Chemie als um Alchemie bei ihm geht. Es gibt da bestimmte magische Vermögen des Nachdrucks, der Balance im Detail, das ist alles sehr erstaunlich.¹⁰⁶

I suggest that this 'alchemy' may also be understood in terms of Benjamin's and Kluge's conception of a radical kind of realism. For one effect of the temporal disjuncture in *Wolff von Amerongen* is to call into question the extent to which the named industrialists continue to hold (and abuse) their powers, even if the textile factory shown in the film may not be the same one as once belonged to the Quandt Family. As Kluge states: 'Es muß möglich sein, die Realität als die geschichtliche Fiktion, die sie ist, auch darzustellen'.¹⁰⁷ Friedl juxtaposes the part factual, part imagined German industrial history with documentary footage and thereby disrupts the standard narrative of this particular German archive. He writes irrationality, corruption and greed into a discourse that is mythologised as the backbone of post-war Germany, rendering it a 'geschichtliche Fiktion'. He has found a way of exposing the relationships that may otherwise remain hidden:

The director has sought to portray the grip of capitalism on our lives. Its web, its systems and patterns, how it shapes our world, its sources of power, its

¹⁰⁶ Farocki, 'Im Andenken an Gerhard Friedl'.

¹⁰⁷ Kluge, 'Die schärfste Ideologie: daß die Realität sich auf ihren realistischen Charakter beruft', p. 119.

means of circulation, its free reign in Germany, France, Italy, Belgium – any country where the camera finds the attentive viewer.¹⁰⁸

In this way, Friedl's method further corresponds to the theory of montage advocated by Kluge, who cites Brecht in his explanation as to how montage should function:

was nützt eine Außenansicht der AEG, wenn ich nicht sehe, was sich in diesem Gebäude alles an Beziehungen, an Lohnarbeit und Kapital, an internationalen Verflechtungen abspielt – eine Fotografie der AEG sagt nichts über die AEG selbst aus. Insofern sind, wie Brecht sagt, die meisten wirklichen Verhältnisse in die Funktionale gerutscht. Das ist der Kern des Realismusproblems. Wenn ich Realismus als eine Kenntnis von Zusammenhängen begreife, dann muß ich für das, was ich nicht im Film zeigen kann, was die Kamera nicht aufnehmen kann, eine Chiffre setzen. Diese Chiffre heißt: Kontrast zwischen zwei Einstellungen; das ist ein anderes Wort für Montage. Es geht also um konkrete Beziehungen zwischen zwei Bildern. Dadurch, daß zwischen zwei Bildern eine Beziehung entsteht und die Bewegung (das sogenannte Filmische) zwischen zwei Bildern steckt, ist in diesem Schnitt die Information versteckt – die in der Realaufnahme in der Einstellung selbst nicht stecken würde.¹⁰⁹

Reading *Wolff von Amerongen* in this way, we might see Friedl's use of disjuncture in the film as an attempt to provide a trope for what cannot be shown, to cite Kluge – the networks and systems and connections that a conventional linear narrative could not encapsulate. The emphasis on industry and capital further underscores the Brechtian/Klugerian character of the film, since it is specifically *these* relationships that must be made visible using film, according to Benjamin and Kluge. They argue that the moving image can add historical and political depth to the photographic image, by rendering more complex the reality it claims to represent by means of montage.

The demands on the viewer to decipher the 'information hidden in the cut', to contemplate the trope that is hinted at by means of the 'contrast between two shots' is then a second way in which *Wolff von Amerongen* may be considered as realist in Klugerian terms.

¹⁰⁸ Gras, p. 81. Source: 'le cinéaste a cherché à rendre compte de l'emprise du capitalisme sur nos vies. Réseau, système, constellation, il forme notre monde, ses lieux de pouvoir, ses modes de circulation, ses types de loisir en Allemagne, en France, en Italie, en Belgique, tout pays que la camera constate le spectateur attentive.'

¹⁰⁹ Alexander Kluge, 'Montage, Authentizität, Realismus', in Klaus Eder and Alexander Kluge, *Ulmer Dramaturgien: Reibungsverluste* (Munich: Hanser, 1980), pp. 97–101 (pp. 97–98).

In order to ‘make sense’ of the narrative, viewers are forced to search for and imagine associations between the narration and the images, as well as between the different shots. Hallensleben comments that the film’s form helps us understand how film montage functions more generally, drawing attention to something of which we are perhaps not always aware. In *Wolff von Amerongen*, ‘[wir können] unsere Assoziationskraft beim Arbeiten beobachten, statt uns wie meist im Kino unbewusst an die Kandare nehmen zu lassen’.¹¹⁰ The film rejects associational montage, that is, it refuses to employ the filmic language that viewers are used to reading and understanding, and instead follows the Klugeian paradigm of preventing the unconscious absorption or consumption of streams of image and sound:

[W]enn ich jetzt noch assoziativ montiere, das heißt die Proportionen nicht berücksichtige, dann mache ich etwas sehr Willkürliches. Das ist im Grunde nichts anderes, als wenn Poeten Gedichte schreiben und Schulkinder müssen sie auswendig lernen – aus welchem Grund müßte deren freie Phantasie etwas auswendig lernen, das ein anderer assoziativ erdacht hat?¹¹¹

I would however agree with Hallensleben and suggest that the film takes Kluge’s demand for non-associational montage a step further: through the repeated, sporadic creation of links between narration and image, *Wolff von Amerongen* makes visible the formula according to which conventional narrative cinema functions. It employs a shared filmic language in these moments of harmony, only to then mutate this language into something unknown, as if to say, ‘that which you thought you understood, you did not’.

Whilst one goal of Kluge’s approach of non-associational montage is to avoid ‘hijacking’ the viewer’s perfectly functioning imagination by giving him or her all the answers, another is to overtly acknowledge that there is no single truth or reality, given that meaning is created in the mind of the viewer. The form of *Wolff von Amerongen* leaves the film wide open for interpretation, and the lack of press material or interviews with the

¹¹⁰ Hallensleben, p. 44.

¹¹¹ Kluge, ‘Montage, Authentizität, Realismus’, p. 100.

director is further testament to this. Thus the third way in which the film corresponds to a radical realism as advocated by Benjamin and Kluge is its rejection of the notion of a linear narrative that could be called reality. The voiceover purports to offer us precisely this, an authoritative, factual account of German industrial history; the satirical tone of the descriptions of the industrialists' idiosyncrasies and foibles undermine the seriousness of this kind of narrative, however. Wenzel writes that Kluge, in his work, 'makes no attempt to homogenise the assembled signifying materials into a univocal discourse of truth',¹¹² and the same could be claimed of Friedl with this film. The re-packaging of factual events in *Wolff von Amerongen* functions as a strategy of protest against the reality-texts with which we are presented in the newspaper, for example.

To make clear the link between Benjamin, Kluge and Friedl, it is useful to refer to Thomas Levin's characterisation of Benjamin, film and reality: 'Film has the potential [...] not so much to penetrate reality as to penetrate the phantasmagoria that distorts and conceals reality from the human sensory and cognitive capacities', Levin writes, referencing Buck-Morss' landmark article on Benjamin's *Kunstwerk* essay.¹¹³ Both Benjamin and Kluge are interested in film's capacity to reveal – and penetrate – the phantasmagoria of reality; in the film, the phantasmagoria is evoked using a constant stream of images and information in continual movement and chronological progression. The viewer is then called upon to read between the lines and to recognise *Wolff von Amerongen* as a protest, thereby (re)activating his or her 'cognitive capacities'.

¹¹² Wenzel, p. 180.

¹¹³ Thomas Y. Levin, 'Film', in Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty and Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), (pp. 315 –320) p. 319.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

A rejection of filmic devices intended to present viewers with a seamless reality – or a ‘univocal discourse of truth’ – characterises all three of the films in this chapter. Schanelec, Dresen and Friedl employ varying strategies in order to disrupt the viewing experience, yet at the same time there is a commitment to authenticity, to the documentary – or indexical – quality of film. With his eschewal of associational montage and protagonists with which viewers can identify, Friedl employs the most experimental form to do this, yet Dresen also looks to shatter what Hansen calls the ‘mythical chain of mirrors’ that constitutes ‘reality’.¹¹⁴ While it offers a predominantly conventional viewing experience, *Halt auf freier Strecke* repeatedly asserts itself as a fiction. That which renders Dresen’s film most Klugerian, however, is its contribution to a counter-public sphere through its representation of death and work.

At the same time, the colour of Schanelec’s realism has similar hues to Kracauer’s; the theoretical crossover lies not in her desire to redeem physical reality, however, but rather in her commitment to the photographic image as carrier of meaning (in place of a character-driven narrative). This brings us to the wider theoretical implications of this process of mapping in the present chapter: to what extent does a diachronic reading of the films deny the historical specificity of the theories? Or, put differently, by aligning Schanelec with Kracauer, is there not a danger of neutralising the urgency of Kracauer’s call to arms? The aim of this chapter – and of this thesis – is not to argue that the politics of the moving image I draw out in Schanelec, Dresen and Friedl are identical to those of Kracauer, Benjamin and Kluge; rather, my objective is to ask whether there are continuities, and if so, what these can tell us about the landscape of contemporary German and Austrian film. Through these filmmakers, I contend, it is possible to identify a profound dissatisfaction with the politics of representation – of environments, individual

¹¹⁴ Hansen, ‘Benjamin, Cinema and Experience’, p. 204.

experiences and histories – and a desire to find alternative ways of engaging with these realities.

CHAPTER FOUR

FRAGMENTED STORIES FOR FRAGMENTED VIEWERS:
71 FRAGMENTE EINER CHRONOLOGIE DES ZUFALLS (1994) AND
CODE INCONNU: RÉCIT INCOMPLET DE DIVERS VOYAGES (2000)
BY MICHAEL HANEKE

One of the central threads that bind Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge is their conviction that film must stimulate the critical faculties of the viewers and jolt them out of their distracted state. The notion of the ‘democratised’ artwork described in Chapter Two – the collaboration between artist and worker – is expanded upon in a different direction here: the levelling takes place between the artist and his or her audience in the moment of reception rather than during the production process. In different ways, Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge each demand the transition from passive viewer (the pervasive mode of spectatorship that each identify in their respective writings about film) to active collaborator. The first part of this chapter will elaborate on the ways in which the ideas of the three thinkers overlap. I focus in particular on the concept of fragmentation as a formal device in a film that both mimics the condition of the modern subject and demands a high degree of intellectual engagement from the spectator in making sense of the narrative. In the second part of the chapter, I show how this dual understanding of fragmentation can be productively applied to two films by Michael Haneke: *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls* (1994) and *Code Inconnu: Récit incomplet de divers voyages* (2000). Haneke famously commented that the films in his early trilogy, of which *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls* forms part, represent ‘Berichte vom Fortschreiten der emotionalen

Vergletscherung meines Landes’,¹ and the theme of emotional and social glaciation recurs over and again in his oeuvre. The term ‘Vergletscherung’ implies that a change of state that has taken place, that a stasis has occurred. It refers to the cool numbness that characterises so many Hanekean figures, and is useful imagery for my consideration of how such figures may be considered as fragmented in ways that resonate with texts by Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge. Furthermore, I propose that these films go beyond the representation of fragmented individuals. By employing formal devices that splinter the story, Haneke realises the political obligation of the director to challenge viewers’ imaginations rather than to numb them, as prescribed by the three thinkers.

FROM CONSUMER TO COLLABORATOR

An idea common to Benjamin and Kracauer is that film is an apt medium for the modern subject on account of its intrinsically fragmented nature. A recurring trope during Kracauer’s ‘Weimar years’ – in the reviews he wrote for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* between 1921 and 1933 – is his objection to the sensationalist, rounded narratives of commercial cinema. He designates as fetishistic its attempt to create wholeness at every level of the filmmaking process, from set building to the piecing together of the different scenes: ‘gleich den Steinchen eines Mosaiks werden sie aneinander gestückt. Statt die Welt in ihrem zerbröckelten Zustand zu lassen, holt man sie wieder in die Welt zurück’.² The director exerts his or her power over nature: Kracauer’s image of piecing back together something that is broken reveals his contempt for this kind of disparate ‘pointillism’. His damning critiques often allude to a dishonest or amoral industry, and he takes particular issue with the output of the UFA film studios in Babelsberg,

¹ See Michael Haneke, ‘Film als Katharsis’ in *Austria (in)felix: zum österreichischem Film der 80er Jahre*, ed. by Francesco Bono (Graz: Blimp, 1992), p. 89

² Siegfried Kracauer, ‘Kaliko Welt: Die Ufa-Stadt zu Neubabelsberg’ (1926), in *KSF* 6.1, pp. 191–197 (p. 196).

which he calls ‘eine Wüste in der Oase’ in his essay entitled ‘Kaliko Welt – Die Ufa Stadt zu Neubabelsberg’ (1926).³ It is not so much the ‘Unnatürlichkeit’ of the film studio to which he objects, but rather that it seeks to give the illusion of being real: ‘die Welt aus Papier-mâché. Alles garantiert Unnatur, alles genau wie die Natur’.⁴ From a distance, the fake trees, lakes, water, and houses appear to be real, they are however ‘Abbilder und Fratzen, die man aus der Zeit gerissen und durcheinander gemischt hat’.⁵ They exist only in the present and have no history. The powers ruling over this world create and dismantle cultures as required; the set is a site of continual metamorphosis, where what has gone before in no way determines what is yet to come. It thus appears to be the *untruthful* nature of film with which Kracauer takes issue. Only small fragments are required to give an impression of wholeness and reality in a film, and in the essay Kracauer gives away the secrets of Murnau’s *Faust* – he shatters the illusion, spoils the secret, and thereby hinders his readers from suspending their disbelief when watching.

In these writings, fragmentation functions for Kracauer as a counterpoint to the illusionary character of the kind of films that confirm the status quo, which is presented like a perfectly round pill for audiences to swallow whole. In the essay ‘Film und Gesellschaft [Die kleinen Ladenmädchen gehen ins Kino]’, for example, Kracauer outlines several common tropes in contemporary film in order to illustrate this argument.⁶ The motif of travel in film, he believes, serves to keep viewers in a perpetual state of intellectual absence since they are not confronted with images that resemble their own realities on screen: ‘die Veränderung der Landschaftsstaffagen lenkt von der Verlogenheit der gesellschaftlichen Begebenheiten ab’.⁷ In popular films, the target audience (whom Kracauer typifies as female shop assistants) is presented with love stories in exotic climes, and consequently ‘die kleinen Ladenmädchen

³ Kracauer, ‘Kaliko Welt’, p. 191.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Siegfried Kracauer, ‘Film und Gesellschaft [Die kleinen Ladenmädchen gehen ins Kino]’ (1927), in *KSF* 6.1, pp. 308–322.

⁷ Ibid., p. 315.

möchten sich so gerne an der Riviera verloben’.⁸ Escapist narratives of this nature serve to mis-direct the imaginative faculties of the spectators: ‘Es hilft der Phantasie auf die unrichtigen Wege, es deckt die Aussicht mit Eindrücken zu, es trägt zu den Herrlichkeiten der Welt, damit ihrer Häßlichkeit nicht geachtet wird’,⁹ and therefore there is no impetus to address the social inequalities on which such narratives hinge.

Benjamin commented on this essay in a letter to Kracauer in March 1927, in which he writes: ‘Ich möchte mit Ihnen gern in 14 Tagen über den großen Aufsatz sprechen, von dem ich viel erwarte’.¹⁰ We have, of course, no way of knowing the content of this conversation, if indeed it took place, but it is clear that Benjamin read and enjoyed Kracauer’s socially critical reading of ‘Die kleinen Ladenmädchen’. For Benjamin, however, fragmentation plays a central role in his formulation of the kind of artwork befitting of the modern subject. This is evident in the formal devices that Benjamin advocates as well as those he practises in his own writing. In the *Kunstwerk* essay, for example, he writes that film has the capacity to explode linear understandings of the world and, amongst its ‘weitverstreuten Trümmer’, new adventures can be had.¹¹ Benjamin’s fragments often take this apocalyptic form: the era of cohesion – of the auratic attachment to wholeness – is past, and new forms must take its place. It is the inherently pieced-together nature of the moving image that merits his championing of the medium as suitable for the masses. In his own scholarly works, too, the idea of rubble, of piecing together fragments in order to make a new kind of sense, is a recurring motif. In relation to his study of German tragedy, Arendt recalls that Benjamin was known to have hundreds of quotations that were immaculately ordered:

⁸ Kracauer, ‘Film und Gesellschaft’, p. 316.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Walter Benjamin, letter to Kracauer dated 4 March 1927 in Walter Benjamin, *Briefe an Siegfried Kracauer*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Marbach am Neckar: Theodor W. Adorno Archiv, 1987), p. 40.

¹¹ Walter Benjamin, ‘Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit’, *GS* 1, pp. 471–508 (p. 502).

Like the later notebooks, this collection was not an accumulation of excerpts intended to facilitate the writing of the study but constituted the main work, with the writing as something secondary. The main work consisted in tearing fragments out of their context and arranging them afresh in such a way that they illustrated one another and were able to prove their *raison d'être* in a free-floating state, as it were.¹²

Arendt comments that quotations – not necessarily in the surrealist form described above – are key to all of Benjamin's works following the Goethe essay. The figure of the 'rag-picker' shows itself in many of his essays, and his Arcades Project is a collection of fragments that together present the reader with fleeting impressions of observed details.¹³ In her introduction to her book on The Arcades Project, Susan Buck-Morss writes that:

The *Passagen-Werk* makes of us historical detectives even against our will, forcing us to become actively involved in the reconstruction of the work. [...] He compels us to search for images [...] that are the key to unlocking the meaning.¹⁴

Here, then, the link between fragmentation and the notion that film must awaken the critical faculties of the spectator becomes clear: denying the reader a whole means that he or she must actively engage with the text to construct meaning.

Fragmentation also has a Brechtian character for Benjamin: the ideal audience is alert and critical, analogous to that which Brecht seeks to generate with his theatrical form. It is an audience capable of contributing to the production of its own experience. This does not necessarily mean becoming an artist, playwright or author. Rather, it means making the

¹² Hannah Arendt, 'Introduction: Walter Benjamin: 1892-1940', in *Illuminations*, pp. 1–55 (p. 47).

¹³ It is worth noting that Benjamin refers to Kracauer as a rag-picker in his essay on 'Die Angestellten'. See 'Ein Aussenseiter macht sich bemerkbar. Zu S. Kracauer, "Die Angestellten"' (1930), in Walter Benjamin, *GS* 3, pp. 219–228 (p. 225). Benjamin writes: 'So steht von Rechts wegen dieser Autor am Schluß da: als ein Einzelner. [...] ein Lumpensammler, frühe – im Morgengrauen des Revolutionstages'.

¹⁴ Susan Buck-Morss, 'Preface' to *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989) pp. ix–xii (p. x).

transition from passive viewer to active ‘collaborator’. In ‘Der Autor als Produzent’, Benjamin writes:

[M]aßgebend [ist] der Modellcharakter der Produktion, der andere Produzenten erstens zur Produktion anzuleiten, zweitens einen verbesserten Apparat ihnen zur Verfügung zu stellen vermag. Und zwar ist dieser Apparat um so besser, je mehr er Konsumenten der Produktion zuführt, kurz aus Lesern oder aus Zuschauern Mitwirkende zu machen imstande ist. Wir besitzen bereits ein derartiges Modell [...]. Es ist das epische Theater von Brecht.¹⁵

Brecht calls for a theatre that is more like sport, where the audience is able to critically assess the ability of the sportsmen before them, and rates sports spectators as the ‘klügsten und fairsten Publikum der Welt’.¹⁶ The success of sport is due to the fundamental *interest* of those watching and to their enjoyment. Thus, transposing the level of critical interest in sport to the realm of theatre is the primary objective. Benjamin writes:

In dem Bestreben, diese Massen fachmännisch, aber ganz und gar nicht auf dem Wege über ‘Bildung’ am Theater zu interessieren, setzt Brechts dialektischer Materialismus unzweideutig sich durch. “Sehr rasch hätte man so ein Theater voll von Fachleuten, wie man Sporthallen voll von Fachleuten hat”.¹⁷

We can assume, then, that to Benjamin, ‘ein Kino voll von Fachleuten’ would be the desired condition for film spectatorship, whereby the audience is presumed to be as knowledgeable about that which is shown as the film’s creator.

¹⁵ Walter Benjamin, ‘Der Autor als Produzent’ (1934), in *GS* 2, pp. 683–701 (p. 696).

¹⁶ Bertolt Brecht, ‘Mehr guten Sport’ (1926), in *Gesammelte Werke* 15, ed. by Suhrkamp Verlag in cooperation with Elisabeth Hauptmann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967), pp. 81–84 (p. 81).

¹⁷ Walter Benjamin, ‘Was ist das epische Theater? (1)’ (1931), in *GS* 2, pp. 683–702, (p. 522). Benjamin quotes Bertolt Brecht, ‘Anmerkungen zur “Dreigroschenoper”’ (1931), in *Gesammelte Werke* 17, ed. by Suhrkamp Verlag in cooperation with Elisabeth Hauptmann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967), pp. 991–1000 (p. 993).

There are clear affinities here between Benjamin and Kluge.¹⁸ Kluge envisages an intelligent, enlightened viewer, and emphasises the need to address him or her as such. He paints a picture of a cinema audience starved of substance, whose imaginative capacities are undernourished and in need of aesthetic and intellectual stimulation. In an interview he gave about the arts magazine he produces, Kluge said '[w]ir wollen die Muskeln strapazieren, die in der Wahrnehmung der Menschen ja vorhanden sind'.¹⁹ Kluge sees the role of the director as not to present truths, but rather to create space for viewers to conceive of their own truths; director and viewer then meet eye-to-eye and their relationship is levelled. Kluge asserts, 'ein guter Film besteht in der Herstellung der Autonomie des Zuschauers'.²⁰ They become a 'Mitwirkende' in Benjamin's terms, or, as Eike Wenzel succinctly puts it, the spectator is treated as 'the author's contemporary and dialogic partner'.²¹ Thus this degree of reciprocity is a prerequisite for the furthering of enlightened, autonomous, *producing* spectators. In *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung*, Kluge and Negt also turn to Brecht to define how to achieve the 'Selbstbestimmung der [Fernseh-] Zuschauer'²²:

Der Rundfunk wäre der denkbar großartigste Kommunikationsapparat des öffentlichen Lebens [...], wenn er es verstünde, nicht nur auszusenden, sondern auch zu empfangen, also den Zuschauer nicht nur hören, sondern auch sprechen zu machen und ihn nicht zu isolieren, sondern ihn in Beziehung zu setzen.²³

¹⁸ On where Kluge and Benjamin intersect in this respect, see also Tara Forrest, *The Politics of Imagination: Benjamin, Kracauer, Kluge* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2007), pp. 154–158.

¹⁹ Astrid Deuber-Mankowsky and Giaco Schiesser, 'In der Echtzeit der Gefühle: Gespräch mit Alexander Kluge', in *Die Schrift an der Wand. Alexander Kluge: Rohstoffe und Materialien*, ed. by Christian Schulte (Osnabrück: Universitätsverlag Rasch, 2000), pp. 415–426 (p. 416).

²⁰ Alexander Kluge, 'Reibungsverlust', in Klaus Eder and Alexander Kluge, *Ulmer Dramaturgien: Reibungsverluste* (Munich: Hanser, 1980), p. 84.

²¹ Eike Friedrich Wenzel, 'Construction Site Film: Kluge's Idea of Realism and His Short Films' in *Alexander Kluge: Raw Materials for the Imagination*, ed. by Tara Forrest (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), pp. 173–190 (p. 181).

²² Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung: Zur Organisationsanalyse von bürgerlicher und proletarischer Öffentlichkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), p. 182.

²³ Negt und Kluge, p. 182, n. 9. Negt and Kluge quote Bertolt Brecht, 'Der Rundfunk als Kommunikationsapparat' (1932), in *Gesammelte Werke*, 18, ed. by Suhrkamp Verlag in cooperation with Elisabeth Hauptmann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967), pp. 127–134 (p. 129).

The answer for Kluge lies in a specific formal approach: one he adopts in his film and television practice, as well as in his short stories, and which represents the mode of ‘realism’ that I explored in greater detail in the previous chapter of this thesis. In Kluge’s work for television, for example, the programmes:

are constructed out of a diverse collection of raw materials – the unfinished, open structure of which encourages the viewer to draw upon his/her own experience and imagination in order to fill out the contours of the programme.²⁴

Kluge’s own practices are based on fragmentation and, as for Benjamin, his desire to engage viewers to draw upon his/her own experience has a political impetus.

In his essay ‘Zuschauer als Unternehmer’, Kluge refers to ‘selbstverschuldete Unmündigkeit’ in order to suggest that the film and television-viewing public is immature and therefore susceptible to manipulation. Indeed, the notion of ‘Mündigkeit’ is helpful here in understanding how the relationship between director and spectator is political for Kluge. It is a term he employs in direct reference to Immanuel Kant’s 1784 essay ‘Was ist Aufklärung’. For Kant, release from one’s ‘selbst verschuldeten Unmündigkeit’²⁵ is the precondition for enlightenment. ‘Unmündigkeit’ designates a state of blissful ignorance: an ‘unmündig’ public is docile and passive, and thus prone to manipulation:

Faulheit und Feigheit sind die Ursachen, warum ein so großer Theil der Menschen, nachdem sie die Natur längst von fremder Leitung frei gesprochen (naturaliter maiorennnes), dennoch gern zeitlebens unmündig bleiben; und warum es Anderen so leicht wird, sich zu deren Vormündern aufzuwerfen.²⁶

²⁴ Tara Forrest, ‘Raw Materials for the Imagination: Kluge’s Work for Television’, in Tara Forrest (ed.), *Alexander Kluge. Raw Materials for the Imagination*, pp. 305–317 (p. 311).

²⁵ Immanuel Kant, ‘Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung’ (1784), in Immanuel Kant, *Samtliche Werke* 5, ed. by J. H. v. Kirchmann (Berlin: Heimann, 1872), pp. 109–120 (p. 111).

²⁶ Ibid.

The enlightened man, however, is a rational, thinking subject and, most importantly, he is *free*. For Kant, the ‘Vormünder’ are authority figures (most problematically, religious ones) in society who reap the benefits of exercising control over the unenlightened masses. For Kluge, the ‘Vormünder’ are television and film producers:

Die Film- und Fernsehkonzerne leben davon, daß sie Geld und ihnen zuarbeitendes Vorstellungsvermögen (unbezahlte Arbeit) aus den Zuschauern herauslocken. Sie ernennen jeden zum mündigen Bürger, sofern er zahlt.²⁷

Kluge argues that a process of dumbing-down in the media serves to keep viewers in the state of ‘Unmündigkeit’; they receive no meaningful challenges through film and television and are instead encouraged to consume content. In an essay that criticises contemporary cultural politics, Kluge states that the film is created in the head of the spectator. ‘Zuschauer sind Produzenten ihrer eigenen Erfahrung’,²⁸ he writes, and points to the perils of producing experience on behalf of the spectator by offering up completely intelligible objects for consumption: the creation of a kind of violent, consuming passivity.²⁹ Thus, both Benjamin and Kluge demand a kind of Brechtian dialogue between filmmaker and spectator for a film to achieve its political ends. In the following section, I suggest that these theories enable a more nuanced understanding of Haneke as a political director.

²⁷ Alexander Kluge, ‘Der Zuschauer als Unternehmer’ (1979), in Alexander Kluge, *Die Patriotin* (Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins, 1979). pp. 300–301 (p. 300).

²⁸ Alexander Kluge, ‘Verabredung mit einem Toten’ (1984), in *Augenzeugen: 100 Texte neuer deutscher Filmemacher*, ed. by Hans Helmut Prinzler and Eric Rentschler (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Autoren, 1988) pp. 474–482 (p. 476).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 479

FORMS OF 'DIALOGFÄHIGKEIT' IN
71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls
 AND *Code Inconnu: Récit incomplet de divers voyages*

Whilst Michael Haneke is the most commercially successful of the filmmakers whose works this study examines, *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls* and *Code Inconnu* are two of his lesser-known films. His directorial portfolio spans forty years, beginning with a series of television films he made whilst working at the Südwestrundfunk (SWF) in Baden-Baden, where he began as an intern in 1967. His success working as a freelance theatre and television director in the 1970s and 80s enabled him to secure funding for his first feature film for cinematic release, *Der siebente Kontinent*, which premiered in 1989. The film is the first part of a trilogy that also includes *Benny's Video* (1992) and *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*. Film scholars have tended to divide Haneke's body of work into two groups that are defined according to the (interrelated) factors of film language and funding structures.³⁰ The first is comprised of the trilogy and the original version of *Funny Games* (1997).³¹ The language of the films is German and they were produced using predominantly Austrian funding.³² The second group encompasses the films Haneke has directed since 1997, of which all but one are in French and received funding from more diverse co-production partners (*Das weiße Band – Eine deutsche*

³⁰ Mattias Frey, 'A cinema of disturbance: the films of Michael Haneke in context', *Senses of Cinema*, 28 (2003) <<http://sensesofcinema.com/2010/great-directors/michael-haneke/>> [accessed October 2012], and Jörg Metelmann, 'Die Autonomie, das Tragische: Über die Kehre im Kinowerk von Michael Haneke', in *Michael Haneke und seine Filme: Eine Pathologie der Konsumgesellschaft*, ed. by Christian Wessely, Gerhard Larcher, Franz Grabner (Marburg: Schüren, 2005), pp. 283–300.

³¹ Haneke later filmed a shot-by-shot remake of *Funny Games* for the English-language market, which premiered in 2008.

³² Of the four films, *Der Siebente Kontinent* and *Funny Games* are solely Austrian productions, whilst *Benny's Video* and *71 Fragmente* are co-productions (Austrian-Swiss and Austrian-German respectively).

Kindergeschichte from 2009 is the exception).³³ This chapter looks at one film from each of these two groups. A large number of prizes at some of the most prestigious international film festivals, critical acclaim outside of Europe, and an ensemble method of working that includes well-known French stars have resulted in Haneke's upward commercial trajectory.³⁴

In 1992, between the release of *Der Siebente Kontinent* and *Benny's Video*, Haneke published a short, programmatic essay entitled 'Film als Katharsis' in which he laments the 'emotionale Vergletscherung meines Landes' and elaborates on how he understands 'glacial' in the context of the social milieu in which he was raised.³⁵ This resulted in critics informally referring to these two films, together with *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*, as the 'Glaciation Trilogy'. These films, Haneke contends, 'berichten über die Schrecknisse der Kälte und den Horror der bürgerlichen Norm',³⁶ but, most importantly in the context of this thesis, they represent a *form of protest* against the 'emotionale Vergletscherung' he describes:

Sie sind gedacht als Polemik gegen das amerikanische Überrumpelungskino und seine Entmündigung des Zuschauers.
Sie sind Plädoyer für ein Kino der insistierenden Fragen an Stelle der schnellen, weil falschen Antworten, ein Plädoyer für erhellende Distanz statt vergewaltigender Nähe, für Verdichtung statt Zerstreuung, für Provokation und Dialog statt Konsum und Einverständnis.
Sie dokumentieren meinen Glauben an die kathartische Wirkung des Kinematographen.³⁷

It is striking that Haneke's complaint about 'amerikanische Überrumpelungskino', 'schnelle Antworten' and 'Zerstreuung' echoes many of Kracauer's criticisms of the bulk of films in

³³ Rosalind Galt, 'The Functionary of Mankind: Haneke and Europe', in *On Michael Haneke*, ed. by Brian Price and John David Rhodes (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2010), pp. 221–244 (pp. 234–235).

³⁴ *Das weiße Band – Eine deutsche Kindergeschichte* (2011) won the Palme d'Or amongst other prizes at Cannes in 2009, as well as the Best Foreign Language Film at the Golden Globes, whilst *Amour* (2012) also won the Palme d'Or, the Best Foreign Language Film and was nominated for five Oscars.

³⁵ Michael Haneke, 'Film als Katharsis', p. 89.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

German cinemas during the Weimar Republic. There are also clear parallels with Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge in his rejection of the consumption of films; like Kluge, Haneke also draws a line between a state of ‘Unmündigkeit’ and a drive to consume. Furthermore, the interplay between the two claims above – the subject of his films, and the ‘cathartic’ effect of film – shows how Haneke connects form with a kind of filmmaking ethics. To speak of art, Haneke has said, there has to be both the ‘Identität von Inhalt und Form’ as well as ‘die Kommunikabilität der Kunst’: ‘Das “Ich” des Künstlers muß ein “Du” meinen, einen Rezipienten. [...] Ohne diese Dialogfähigkeit findet Kunst nicht statt’.³⁸ Where the content is the glaciation of society, alienation, as well as violent ruptures in communication, the form of the film must then engage with this, inviting the audience to participate in a dialogue rather than giving ‘fast answers’. I will take Haneke’s assertion on the identity of content and form as an organising structure for the chapter: I will first show how he portrays a kind of crisis of wholeness in the narratives of *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls* and *Code Inconnu*, and then examine how Haneke seeks to achieve a ‘Dialogfähigkeit’ in formal terms, which I align with the Brechtian dialogue between artist and audience as advocated by Benjamin and Kluge.

71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls (henceforth ‘*71 Fragmente*’) begins with the following white text against a black background: ‘Am 23.12.93 erschöß der 19-jährige Student Maximilian B. in der Zweigstelle einer Wiener Bank drei Menschen und tötete sich kurz darauf selbst mit einem Schuß in dem Kopf’.³⁹ Over the course of the film, we see snippets from the lives of 10 different characters in the two and a half months preceding this incident. These disparate lives begin to intertwine and then violently collide in the bank on 23 December. The film comprises exactly 71 scenes (or ‘fragments’) of news footage and the ‘actual film’, which is based on real events that Haneke read about in the news the previous

³⁸ Thomas Assheuer, *Nahaufnahme Michael Haneke: Gespräche mit Thomas Assheuer* (Berlin: Alexander, 2008), p. 51.

³⁹ All quotations from the film refer to *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*, dir. by Michael Haneke (Artificial Eye, 1994).

year.⁴⁰ The first protagonist we meet is a young boy named Marion, hiding in the back of a lorry, who has illegally entered Austria from Romania. We see Marion searching through dustbins for food, living in an underground station, stealing comics from the shop there, and begging on the street. When he turns himself in to the police, his story makes it into the news. This marks the first crossover between characters: a couple in the middle of an adoption process see the report on television and decide to adopt Marion rather than the girl, Anni, whom they have been visiting in a children's home. Also watching is an elderly man, Herr Tomek, who is the father of one of the cashiers in the bank where the shooting takes place. We see the tense relationship between the dejected, lonely father and his busy daughter. We also follow a middle-aged male security guard in the bank, Hans Nohal, his strained marriage and sickly newborn as well as some events in the life of 19-year old Maximilian B that result in his being in possession of a gun in the bank on the day of the shooting.

The day begins with the theft of a collection of weapons by a young military cadet, which are sold on twice before reaching Maximilian, and ends with a series of incidents at a petrol station and in the bank that appear to make Maximilian so angry that he fetches the gun from his car and shoots sporadically around the bank. Also in the bank at the time are Herr Tomek, Frau Brunner (the adoptive mother of Marion), and Hans, the security guard. Maximilian then commits suicide in a car outside the bank. The film ends with a news bulletin that includes the story about the bank massacre, an interview with the petrol station attendant, and a black and white photograph of Maximilian. These stories remain fragmented for the most part of the film. The various snapshots offer little more than glimpses into the lives of the characters, and are as brief as a few seconds of the security guard's wife, Maria, looking in the mirror, and as banal as elderly Herr Tomek heating up his soup and sitting down to watch television.

⁴⁰ In the interview with Serge Toubiana on the DVD bonus of *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*, Haneke speaks about the real news events that influenced his decision to make the film.

When he is living in the station or begging on the street, Marion is invisible to those around him, the only exceptions being the newspaper street vendor and the disembodied voice of a security guard in the station when Marion teeters too close to the edge of the tracks. His social immobility is represented visually: he remains a ghost-like figure, static as those around him pass through the station or hurry past on the street. Unlike the thousands of *sans-papiers* who cross the border into Germany illegally and remain politically invisible, Marion is rendered visible through his mediatization and subsequent integration into society. He is given a legitimate identity when his image and voice are broadcast to the public: his peripheral existence at the start of the film is a direct result of his geographical displacement, a condition which is then resolved by the Brunners' acceptance of Marion into their home. This kind of resolution is, however, refused to Anni, the girl whom the couple initially wanted to adopt. Whereas Marion eventually finds a voice as he starts to learn German with Frau Brunner, we do not hear a single word from Anni. As Haneke scholar Jörg Metelmann argues, it is Anni who represents the truly alienated child rather than Marion:

Anni wäre [...] die eigentliche Herausforderung, denn sie ist ja gerade das vermeintlich Vertraute, ein in der bekannten Gesellschaft großgewordenes Kind, das sich in seinem Schweigen und seiner Unzugänglichkeit radikal verweigert.⁴¹

Viewers are not allowed to identify with Anni, nor may they pity her; the signs that would prompt a reaction in the audience, such as emotional expressions, gestures, hints at past suffering, and so on, are lacking. The shots of her face betray little feeling, leaving the viewer as clueless as the Brunners. When Anni is unable to express gratitude for the gift from her prospective adopters, or to accept physical contact from them, we as viewers are also denied the gratification of Anni's de-alienation through her acceptance into the family. We are not privy to the moment when she is told that the Brunners will no longer adopt her, nor do we

⁴¹ Jörg Metelmann, *Zur Kritik der Kino-Gewalt. Die Filme von Michael Haneke* (Munich: Fink, 2003), p. 115.

follow her story beyond the point where the couple choose to adopt Marion instead. The fragmented structure of the different storylines thus serves to deny viewers the illusion of being presented with the ‘whole’ story. Anni’s isolated figure is relegated to a character of the past, a solitary child that represents society’s failure to assimilate its ‘difficult’ members. As Brigitte Peucker observes, family crises offer the primary setting for Haneke’s exploration of emotional glaciation: ‘the wholeness of the bourgeois family [functions] as a guarantee for the wholeness of society’.⁴² In this plotline of the film, the bourgeois family is sacrificed in favour of the ‘integration’ of the Romanian orphan, an outlook that is progressive, in some respects, whilst at the same time exposing fears surrounding the disruption of conventional family structures.

Communication breakdown and the resulting isolation define other familial relationships in the film, such as that of the elderly Herr Tomek and his daughter. In the first encounter between the two, it is not clear how the cashier knows the man who has come to withdraw cash from her counter in the bank. The ‘du’ form of address implies a certain level of familiarity, yet she is too distracted to engage in any kind of meaningful conversation with him. The transaction takes place, and it is only when she tells him that she is too busy to chat that she calls him ‘Papa’ and their relationship becomes clear. The other scenes with Herr Tomek reinforce his characterisation as a lonely, isolated figure. One scene comprises a two-and-a-half minute long take that follows him around his small living space as he prepares soup and then sits down to eat at the table, as the television set is visible in the next room. An original newsreel provides the soundtrack to the scene, and shares the space with Herr Tomek rather than merely providing a backdrop. Indeed, from the moment when he sits to eat and focuses his attention on the television, the news becomes the focal point for both protagonist and viewers, who watch with him over his shoulder. His eating and watching occupy a kind of

⁴² Brigitte Peucker, ‘Fragmentation and the Real: Michael Haneke’s Family Trilogy’, in *After Postmodernism: Austrian Film and Literature in Transition*, ed. by Willy Riemer (Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 2000), pp. 176–188 (p. 187).

banal middle space between camera and half of the television screen, where the 'real' action is taking place. The effect of this is that the spectator is encouraged to look past the protagonist, rendering him marginal in the scene.

One of the most memorable and oft-cited scenes shows the security guard Hans Nohal and his wife Maria eating dinner together. The disjuncture between the two is illustrated in previous scenes through silence; the most we hear from Hans is his brief prayer in the morning, whilst Maria cries to herself in the bathroom, struggling with the burden of a sick baby. We see the couple mechanically perform their morning routine and the awaited moment of togetherness or word of consolation or reassurance uttered by one to the other never comes. The dinner scene then represents a cruel culmination of this loaded silence between Hans and Maria. It comprises a two-and-a-half minute-long medium shot of them eating together without exchanging any words, each appearing deep in thought. Twenty seconds into the scene, Hans goes to take a sip of beer and before doing so murmurs 'Ich liebe dich'. Maria does not react at first, then stops eating and asks Hans, 'Was ist los? Bist du betrunken oder was?' Her manner is aggressive, and she questions Hans's agenda: 'Was willst du?' She asks Hans about his unusual behaviour repeatedly, suspicious that he wants something from her. Hans extends his hand and gives her a short, sharp slap on the cheek. They are silent: Maria is shocked, goes to stand up, but then sits back down. She eventually reaches out and briefly grasps Hans' arm, and then they slowly resume eating, with a mood of pervasive sadness. Both reach out to the other in this scene, Hans by his declaration of love, and Maria by her brief touching of his arm. Yet they do not meet in the middle. This instance of total communication breakdown is one of many in the film, in which any meaning appears to evaporate between the moment of utterance and its reception. This violent outburst also exemplifies the way in which characters react to seemingly mundane events in shocking ways. Though Hans' lashing out is not overtly related to the massacre at the end of the film, we may read these incidents as

symptomatic of the social alienation experienced by the murderer, Maximilian B.

The snippets of his life over the two months portray the killer as a relatively well-to-do student who shares a room with a computer scientist. He plays ping-pong, talks to his parents on the phone, and socialises with friends. However, the content of the film is such that this information provides no clue as to why he eventually commits a spontaneous, violent act in the bank. On the day of the shooting, 23 December, Maximilian fills up his car at a petrol station. When he goes to pay, he realises that he has no cash, and the cash machine at the bank opposite is out of order. Meanwhile a queue forms at the petrol station, and we can sense Maximilian's growing frustration. He enters the bank to withdraw cash from the cashier at the moment Herr Tomek arrives to give his daughter Christmas presents for his grandchildren. We see Mrs. Brunner tell Marion to wait in the car before she enters the bank. Inside, Maximilian cuts in at the front of the queue, is cursed at by the other people waiting, and is pushed to the floor by an angry man trying to withdraw money. Maximilian leaves the bank, goes to his car, fetches the gun, returns and points and shoots around the room. He returns to the car and we hear a further shot as he shoots himself. The film cuts to inside the bank, where we do not see whom he has shot; indeed the only victim shown is no more than the side of a body and an expanding pool of blood. We can surmise from the information at the beginning of the film that the three fatalities are Frau Brunner, Herr Tomek and the security guard, Hans Nohal.

For the characters in the film, there are two possible consequences of this kind of glacial existence: to become a victim or a perpetrator of violence, or both in the case of Maximilian, who commits murder and then suicide. We witness the acts of staged violence of Hans briefly slapping Maria, and Maximilian's shooting and suicide, and an undercurrent of violence and neglect runs throughout the film: we see Maximilian exiting his student residence after a fellow student has committed suicide and stopping to stare at the chalk outline on the

pavement that indicates where the body fell; there is the implication that Anni has suffered some kind of abuse which resulted in her living in a children's home and her distrust of adults; and since Marion has fled Romania and because one of the integrated clips of news footage shows civil violence in the country, we may also assume that Marion has also experienced violence in the past.

Given that the other two films in the Glaciation Trilogy, *Der siebente Kontinent* (1989) and *Benny's Video* (1992) also centre around killings – the joint suicide of a family in the former, and a murder of a schoolgirl by her schoolmate in the latter – and that the trilogy is intended to comment on the state of emotional glaciation in Austria, Haneke draws a clear line between extreme acts of violence and social malaise that affect society *as a whole*. Jörg Metelmann cites Zygmunt Bauman in identifying Maximilian's outburst at the end of *71 Fragmente* as stemming

*aus der Privatisierung, Deregulierung und Dezentrierung der Identitätsprobleme. [...] Die Demontage des kollektiven, institutionalisierten und zentralisierten Rahmens der Identitätsbildung, der bisher staatlicherseits garantiert war, hat nun einen leeren, einen inexistenten Ort der Verhandlung von Identität hinterlassen.*⁴³

Metelmann thus argues that the vacuous character of Western industrialised societies of the type portrayed in *71 Fragmente* creates the conditions in which individuals may run amok. He draws a line between fragmented, individualised society and the corresponding form of violence: irrational spontaneous violence. This is certainly a convincing reading of Maximilian's actions: Metelmann historically contextualises the concept of 'running amok', tracing its usage back to the sixteenth century, when Dutch, Portuguese and British colonisers would encounter 'spontaneous' violent behaviour among the colonised communities and use this to emphasise distinctions between civilisation and primitivism, order and chaos, and

⁴³ Metelmann, *Zur Kritik der Kino Gewalt*, p. 121. Metelmann quotes Zygmunt Bauman, *Moderne und Ambivalenz: Das Ende der Eindeutigkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1995), p. 262. Emphasis in original.

humanity and barbarity.⁴⁴ Metelmann is then suggesting that the act of murder in *71 Fragmente* can be read as a social criticism rather than as the portrayal of an isolated violent act by an unstable individual. This state of isolation for the characters ends only in death, where one character from each of the previously disparate strands meets in this unifying scene. Haneke's examination of violent explosions in a bourgeois setting represents a further strong connection between his films and Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge. The link between alienation and violence is an argument that Benjamin rehearses in the Epilogue of the *Kunstwerk* essay, and one that has been most comprehensively discussed by Susan Buck-Morss in her seminal 'Aesthetics and Anaesthetics' essay.⁴⁵ It is a theoretical strand that I address more fully in the final chapter of this thesis.

Code Inconnu (2000) is a sequel to *71 Fragmente* in a number of ways. Whilst no single violent act takes centre stage, other forms of violence are palpable throughout this multi-layered film set in Paris and Kosovo. Moreover, it is the only other film outside the Glaciation Trilogy in which each scene is separated by a black screen, imposing on this film, too, a fragmented form. Like *71 Fragmente*, *Code Inconnu* is made up of different stories that overlap in random encounters. Here, however, the connection between the characters becomes clear earlier in the film. Whilst this makes it initially easier to follow the storyline, other elements of the narrative render the film even more puzzling than *71 Fragmente*.

A strong undercurrent of racial tension in *Code Inconnu* finds release at various moments in the film, which drive the narrative forward. Anne Laurent (Juliette Binoche) is a white French theatre and film actress living in Paris together with her partner, Georges (Thierry Neuvic), a war photographer who travels to Kosovo and Afghanistan over the course of the film. Whilst we do not follow Georges on his trips, his letters home are presented as a

⁴⁴ Metelmann, *Zur Kritik der Kino-Gewalt*, pp. 121–122.

⁴⁵ Walter Benjamin, 'Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit' in *GS* 1, pp. 471–508 (pp. 506–508). See also Susan Buck-Morss, 'Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered', *October*, 62 (1992), 3–41.

voiceover against a slide show of still images. We also see a film-within-a-film, a thriller that Anne is currently shooting, and Anne's image is thus refracted into these two different characters in *Code Inconnu*. Also featured in the film are Georges' father and teenage brother, Jean, who live on a farm in a rural area outside of Paris, and Maria, an illegal white Kosovan immigrant. The final narrative strand focuses on Amadou, a young black Parisian man, and his family: his deaf younger sister, his father, who is a taxi driver, and his mother. Unlike in *71 Fragmente*, where the different storylines converge at the end of the film, in *Code Inconnu* the collision takes place in the second scene. We see Anne leave her apartment building on a busy Parisian street, and her surprise at being met by Jean, the younger brother of her partner. He is angry with his father and asks if he can stay with Anne; she consents on the condition that he return to the farm the following day, and gives him the keys to her apartment. Jean wanders aimlessly along the street, stops to watch some musicians from afar, then crumples up a paper bag he has in his hands and, without looking down, throws it into the lap of a woman begging on the corner of a street (Maria). As Jean walks off along the street, a young black man (Amadou) taps his shoulder and asks Jean to apologise to Maria for humiliating her. Jean refuses, Amadou gets increasingly angry and the two begin to tussle. Amadou is as insistent that Jean acknowledge his degrading behaviour as Jean is adamant that he must get away. Maria leaves in the other direction, crowds gather around the two, Anne reappears and the police arrive. Amadou defends his intervention and Jean contests the accusations; the police fetch Maria and all three are taken to the police station.

The impact of this encounter is felt most strongly by Maria, who is deported to Romania. We witness her arrival in a dusty ghost-like town made up of half-finished houses, and her excited family welcoming her home. Maria fulfils a function in the narrative of *Code Inconnu* similar to that of Marion in *71 Fragmente*: she represents those who are illegal and marginalised, members of society who are less visible and treated as such by characters like

Jean. Her isolation is not resolved upon her return home, however. She lets her husband and children believe that she was working as a teacher in Paris, keeping the true nature of her work secret. A wall between her and her family remains and it is only when she attempts to re-enter Europe and begins to panic in anticipation of what awaits her that this wall crumbles and she confides the shame she feels at receiving money from strangers to an acquaintance. The last scene to feature Maria returns her to the same strip of Parisian street in which she was before her deportation. She finds a spot to sit beneath a shop front, and is asked to leave immediately by two men who appear to threaten her. The scene suggests that even her position at society's periphery may be endangered.

The theme of communication breakdown is exemplified in the relationship between Jean and his father, who is not given a name in the film. Neither appears capable of reaching out to the other in a language he will understand. Whilst Jean explains to Anne that he has no intention to stay and take over the farm as planned, the only message he relays to his father is by a short impersonal note stating that he has gone and asking him not to try to find him. Jean is an angry, sullen character, whose fury erupts in short sharp bursts and is directed at himself as much as at others. His father, on the other hand, remains stubbornly silent and appears as unable as Hans in *71 Fragmente* to reach out to his loved one. Indeed, the sorrowful dinner-table scene in *Code Inconnu* between Jean and his father in which the atmosphere is laden with unspoken pleas and accusations resembles the scene between Hans and Maria. Jean has just returned from his escape to the city, and finds his father eating soup alone at a table in a dark, sparsely decorated room. They do not look at each other and barely speak; the father fetches his son a bowl of soup, finishes his meal and exits into the next room, where we see him staring ahead into nothing in particular. Both Jean's father and Hans find solace in the dark, appearing only as outlines (Figs. 28–31). Whilst Hans in *71 Fragmente* reaches out by saying 'Ich liebe dich' to Maria, Jean's father presents his son with a motorcycle. Here, too, the result is

further isolation since Jean disappears and leaves his father alone on the farm. We see Jean's father enter the barn alone, then Jean leave, excitedly, riding off on the motorcycle. The camera remains fixed on the barn as we hear the sound of the engine fade into the distance; the gratification of seeing Jean receive the gift from his father is denied to us, and instead we are left to contemplate the empty space he has left behind. The storyline between the two remains unresolved; Jean does not return, and his father shoots all the animals on the farm in a tragic gesture of surrender.

If *Code Inconnu* is about social alienation, however, it is as much about the effort of individuals to overcome this state. The storyline hinges on three specific acts of intervention and non-intervention, where the consequences of the action/non-action significantly shape the lives of the characters involved. The scene at the beginning of the film between Jean, Maria and Amadou represents the first of these acts. Amadou positions himself as a defender of morality, attempting to force an interaction between two individuals who have little contact with others and whose paths would never otherwise cross. The scene has a theatrical quality: when the police arrive, Amadou is positioned at centre stage and eloquently explains the situation to his audience, introducing each of the protagonists in turn (Fig. 32). His oratorical skills fail him, however, as his position as neutral observer shifts to that of perpetrator in the eyes of the police and bystanders. The consequence of his actions is Maria's deportation and his own arrest.

Despite this, Amadou in many ways represents the antithesis of the more glacial characters in *Code Inconnu*. Though they speak the same language, Jean seems unable to comprehend what Amadou asks of him or what he has done wrong; once again, we see meaning evaporate in the space between utterance and reception. Whilst Jean and his father are unable to exchange a word, Amadou's large family does not suffer the same affliction. Later in the film, we see Amadou with a white French girl in the same restaurant in which

Georges and Anne are dining. Amadou animatedly recounts a story about his father's time as a sailor to his date, thus making use of the oral tradition of storytelling not only to forge a relationship with his conversation partner, but also as a means of maintaining and strengthening a sense of family and tradition. As the teacher of a drumming group for children and youths, which includes his deaf sister, Amadou has another means of establishing a sense of togetherness and community at his disposal: the image and sound of the group represents a stark contrast to the dark, silent, isolated surroundings of the other family in the film.

The second act is one of non-intervention on Anne's part. Whilst ironing at home and watching television, Anne hears screams and shouting from the flat above. She mutes the television and stands still, listening. After a minute, she pours herself a drink, switches the sound back on, and resumes her ironing. On another day, Anne returns home to find a handwritten note that has been pushed under the door to her apartment. She reads it several times (we are not shown what it says) and pours herself a stiff drink. She then crosses the hallway and knocks on the door of her neighbour, Madame Becker, to ask if she wrote the note. Madame Becker denies this, and appears to be affronted by the interruption, saying: 'I don't know what you want'.⁴⁶ Anne appears unable to find the words to voice her concern, or to ask her neighbour for help or advice. When she asks her partner Georges for his opinion, he is equally uninterested and refuses to comment, insisting that her neighbours have nothing to do with him. Finally, we see Anne at a burial in a cemetery in the city. By Madame Becker's presence we are led to believe that it is the funeral of the neighbours' nine-year old child from the apartment above. The implication is, then, that Anne's hesitation in responding to the note, whatever it may have said, and her unwillingness to open the lines of communication with her neighbours, may have led to the death of a child.

⁴⁶ All quotations from the film refer to *Code Inconnu: Récit incomplet de divers voyages*, dir. by Michael Haneke (Artificial Eye, 2000). Source: 'Je ne sais pas ce que vous voulez'. All translations from French in this chapter are my own.

The third instance of intervention takes place towards the end of the film, when Anne is on her way home in the underground. Two young French-Arab men begin to hassle her, asking whether she is a model and if her unwillingness to answer their questions is a sign of arrogance. They continue to taunt her as she remains silent and moves to the front of the carriage. All other passengers remain silent. One of the men follows her and continues to ask her questions, saying that he is looking for a little affection. He sits down next to her, silent, and looks around. The tension is palpable as Anne stares straight ahead, as does the passenger on the other side of her, a French-Arab man of around Anne's age. Just as the train stops at the next station and the doors open, her tormentor turns his head, spits in Anne's face, and then rushes off the train. The man to Anne's right sticks out his leg and trips up the young man, who jumps back on the train to threaten him, asking 'are you an idiot or what?'⁴⁷ The older man tells the younger one in Arabic that he should be ashamed of himself. Once the young man has left the train, Anne thanks the older man who intervened; her voice cracks and she starts crying.

By forcing us to question our own position in relation to the moral dilemmas that are played out on screen, these instances represent one way that Haneke engages in a dialogue with viewers on a narrative level. I would, however, make a clear distinction between the first of these instances of intervention, and the second and third. In the first, it is clear with whom viewers should identify: we have witnessed the wrongdoing – Jean's behaviour towards Maria – and it is therefore not difficult to side with the voice of reason, Amadou. The line between 'right' and 'wrong' is unambiguous here, and our sense of identification is arguably heightened when the police and bystanders do not believe Amadou's story, since a double injustice has then been suffered. In the other two scenarios, however, this distinction is less clear. For example, we are not shown what is contained in the note Anne receives, nor do we meet the

⁴⁷ Source: *t'es con ou quoi?*

family that live above her. This makes it difficult for viewers to ‘care’ about the scenario, as we are too far removed. We look on with the same degree of coldness and distance that Anne appears to exercise throughout the film. As she walks alongside Madame Becker after the funeral, the single tear that has gathered at the tip of Madame Becker’s nose is the only sign betraying a drop of emotion.

Indeed, Anne is arguably the most glacial of Hanekean figures. In contrast to the happiness, fear, horror and madness she performs in character on screen and on stage, her off-screen persona appears flat and distant. Even the fleeting moment of closeness between her and Georges in the supermarket is preceded by a series of such provocative and dramatic statements that it is difficult to distinguish whether the emotion is intended to be genuine within the film’s narrative. This is a notion to which Haneke alludes in a scene in the horror film Anne is shooting, when an off-screen voice tells Anne that he wants to her to ‘show me your real face!’⁴⁸ Most puzzling perhaps is Anne’s return to her flat after her experience on the underground. We see her walking along the street, expressionless, and enter her apartment building, which has a touch pad for the entry code at the door. When Georges later returns home from a trip, he types in the code and the door remains locked. He crosses the road and looks up at Anne’s window. He uses a payphone but does not speak to anyone, and finally we see him hail a taxi and drive off. We are left wondering why Anne may have changed the code, and whether something in the preceding sequence of events has somehow dramatically altered her perspective on her life or on her relationship.

Here, then, we can see how characterisation is one way that Haneke refrains from giving ‘schnelle Antworten’ and in so doing, stimulates a critical, intelligent mode of spectatorship in his viewers. In fact, Anne is not the only character whose ‘code’ is unknown. In both *71 Fragmente* and *Code Inconnu*, we are frequently denied the clues that allow us to

⁴⁸ Source: ‘montrez-moi votre vrai visage!’

understand and rationalise the actions and circumstances presented to us on screen. I would argue that Amadou is exceptional because he is one of the only characters with whom viewers are invited to identify. In classical cinematic convention, intra and extra-diegetic markers are employed to reveal the psyche of a character: these include emotive gestures, facial expressions, affective dialogue; they may be emotive music, camera angles placing the viewer in the position of the character and thereby inviting empathy, or the integration of explanatory dream, fantasy or flashback sequences. If these are absent or subverted, viewers are less able to identify with a character, if at all. In both *71 Fragmente* and *Code Inconnu*, Haneke uses such markers sparingly, and instead develops a film language that Georg Seeßlen refers to as ‘anti-mythisch, anti-psychologisch und anti-melodramatisch’.⁴⁹ Metelmann notes that whilst we are not given an emotional ‘hook’ for a character, we can nevertheless recognise him or her as a particular type who comes to represent a demographic or social group. For example, nothing about the characters of Hans and Maria Nohal in *71 Fragmente* is strange or unfamiliar: their morning routine comprises a series of mundane actions performed in unremarkable surroundings. The kettle is filled, placed on the hob, and boils, the baby’s nappy is changed, clothes are taken from the chair on which they were placed the previous night and put on (Figs. 33–36). Moreover, the shots are framed so that the subject is not shown, which visually serves to make Hans and Maria indistinct from other Austrian couples; their performance of the routine appears to be precisely that, a performance of scripted gestures by which they are bound. On the other hand, they are completely mysterious: we have no idea why they lie awake at night, or what has created such distance between them.

The consequences of this kind of characterisation are wide-ranging: firstly, the audience is unable to identify or emotionally engage with the characters and thus may adopt a

⁴⁹ Georg Seeßlen, ‘Strukturen der Vereisung: Blick, Perspektive und Gestus in den Filmen Michael Hanekes’, in *Michael Haneke und seine Filme: Eine Pathologie der Konsumgesellschaft*, ed. by Christian Wessely, Gerhard Larcher and Franz Grabner (Marburg: Schüren, 2005), pp. 47–66 (p. 48).

more critical standpoint towards the narrative. Haneke has said that, ‘ein Film, der Psychologie ausspart, hat mehr Chancen, die Struktur, die Verhältnisse der Dinge zu zeigen. Deshalb sind meine Filme stets antipsychologisch’.⁵⁰ The director therefore sees this distance between spectator and protagonist as productive as it allows space for consideration of the ‘structure and the relationship between things’. Seeßlen and Metelmann both read this technique – the alienation of the viewer in order to encourage critical reflection on the subject – in the tradition of Brecht’s *Verfremdungseffekt* and consider Haneke’s glacial figures as exemplary of the notion of *Gestus*.⁵¹ Metelmann writes, for example:

Durch Verfremdung werden einzelne Handlungsmomente aus dem vermeintlich natürlichen Fluß der gesellschaftlichen Zirkulation herausgehoben, als typisch markiert und zu einem größeren Komplex zusammengefügt. Dieser ist dann der Gesamtgestus.⁵²

He suggests that the characters display behaviours, patterns, rituals and gestures in a factual, unemotional way in order to make the viewer aware of the ‘milieugebundene Natur’ of his or her behaviour.⁵³ The ‘Gesamtgestus’ is revealed as a web of patterns specific to a social group or class, in a particular historical context, that are not ‘natural’ but learned and can therefore be changed or un-learned.

Similarly, Seeßlen also notes that the lack of emotion played out on screen in Haneke’s films (up to and including *Le Temps du Loup* in 2003) mean that the characters appear as types rather than individuals:

⁵⁰ Michael Haneke, ‘Im Gespräch mit Roland Vogler’ in the press kit for *Benny’s Video*, ed. by Gisela Meuser for Pandora Film, p. 1, quoted in Metelmann, *Zur Kritik der Kino-Gewalt*, p. 157.

⁵¹ Metelmann, ‘Michael Haneke’s “Episches Kino”: Über Verfremdung, Gestus und Gesellschaftskritik im Anschluß an Bertolt Brecht’, in *Schaulust: Theater und Film – Geschichte und Intermedialität*, ed. by Christian Maintz, Oliver Möbert and Matthias Schumann (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2002), pp. 255–278, and Seeßlen, ‘Strukturen der Vereisung’, pp. 57–58.

⁵² Metelmann, ‘Michael Haneke’s Episches Kino’, p. 269.

⁵³ Metelmann, *Zur Kritik der Kino-Gewalt*, p. 160.

Automatisch müßte sich [der Zuschauer] die Frage stellen, woher denn in dieser Welt die Gefühle kommen sollen. Zur gleichen Zeit aber verhindert auch die Kamera in ihrer Fähigkeit zur Intimität und der genaue Blick auf die materiellen Dinge eine mögliche Fluchtbewegung, die Figuren auf der Leinwand primär metaphorisch zu verstehen, sie nicht als Abbilder konkreter Wirklichkeit, sondern als Sinnbilder zu begreifen.⁵⁴

Where ‘Verfremdung’ in the Brechtian sense is one consequence of the type of characterisation employed in *71 Fragmente* and *Code Inconnu*, then, Seeßlen here gestures towards another. The viewer automatically searches for a psychological rationale behind the actions presented on screen, yet it is absent in its anticipated form of expressions, music, and so on. This forces the viewer to look harder, and to seek different avenues of understanding in order to slot the characters’ choices into the coherent narrative that he or she imagines as the film progresses.

The active, engaged mode of spectatorship demanded by Haneke is clear if we consider Anni in *71 Fragmente*: we are not only left wondering why Anni is so damaged, but also why it is that the Brunners so readily reject her and decide to adopt Marion instead. Haneke’s characterisation of Anni is ‘anti-psychological’ and ‘anti-melodramatic’, like that of the Nohals. Until we catch a glimpse of her face around a third of the way through the film, Anni remains a nonspecific child spoken about by others. Indeed, her name is the diminutive of the generic name that Haneke often gives his female protagonists, ‘Anne’ (Juliette Binoche plays ‘Anne Laurent’, partner of ‘Georges’ in *Caché*; Emmanuelle Riva plays ‘Anna’, partner of ‘Georg’ in *Amour*; Isabelle Huppert plays ‘Anna’ in *Le Temps du Loup*). Like Herr and Frau Brunner, the viewer is denied access to Anni’s inner thoughts; her face remains expressionless throughout, and often we see only the back of her head, or her figure in the distance, turned away. Moreover, the circumstances which led to Anni living in a foster home are never revealed; the

⁵⁴ Seeßlen, ‘Strukturen der Verreisung’, p. 51.

viewer is left to speculate that it may be for the same reason she appears traumatised – timid, brittle, and unable to talk to her prospective foster parents or look them in the eyes. Thus, in both *71 Fragmente* and *Code Inconnu* we find a constellation of familiar ‘types’ performing familiar rituals with unfamiliar or mysterious motivations. There are indeed exceptions (Amadou in *Code Inconnu*, for example), yet many of the characters are this kind of familiar ‘type’, male and female, in different social milieu and in different cultural environments.

In *71 Fragmente*, the biggest mystery presented to us is Maximilian: why does he procure the gun in the first place? Why is he so angry? What drives him to react violently to the situation in the bank and the petrol station? Whilst we are not given any answers, some scenes indicate a kind of social malaise: there is certainly a tension to Maximilian’s behaviour in the various fragments that form his narrative strand. In one scene we see him sitting in the university cafeteria with three friends (one of whom procures the gun for him), as his roommate challenges one of the others to solve a puzzle in under a minute, for a bet of 100 Schillings. The puzzle is a template for a computer game that he is developing, whereby fragments of a shape must be pieced back together. The scene is in real time and we see the friend trying various combinations and then failing to form the pieces into a cross. He refuses to pay, then rips the puzzle pieces into smaller pieces. Without warning, Maximilian abruptly stands up in rage and launches his lunch tray into the air. Flustered, he apologises.

Another scene shows Maximilian playing ping-pong against an automated machine for two minutes and 50 seconds with a static camera. This extended screen time dedicated to the same repeated action evokes different stages of ‘watching’ in the viewer. Haneke comments:

At first, I see a boy playing. Then I tell myself, “I get it, next scene”, as typically happens in movies. Then it amuses me, then it infuriates me. Then it tires me. Then I think, “let’s see where this is going”. And at one point, I begin to watch.⁵⁵

The length of the take represents an endurance test, where the spectator is challenged to look more closely in order to find out what he or she is being shown beyond the ping-pong game. One critic locates a possible avenue of understanding in Haneke’s lengthy shots: John David Rhodes employs Bazin to discuss this technique, claiming that it ‘implies [...] both a more active mental attitude on the part of the spectator and a more positive contribution to the action in progress [...] he is called upon to exercise at least a minimum of personal choice. It is from his attention and his will that the meaning of the image in part derives’.⁵⁶

The fragment invites us to reflect on Maximilian’s psychological state: his mechanical perseverance despite increasing discomfort and exhaustion reveals a degree of obsession – his shots get smaller and smaller as his energy levels dwindle, yet he continues on and on. It also illustrates his alienation. There is no interaction, here – Maximilian is playing against a robot and the hum of the machine and the monotonous crack of the ping-pong balls effectively conveys a vacuous environment with no beginning nor end, reinforced by the black spacers at the beginning and end of the fragment. The length of the shot is thus necessary to engage our thought processes, as it makes it impossible for us merely to regard the scene as an informative snapshot of one of Maximilian’s hobbies. Whilst these two incidents do not provide concrete clues as to the motivation behind his purchase of a gun or his actions in the bank, they hint at the kind of pressures bearing down on the protagonist. It useful here to refer to a comment that Haneke made on the act of interpretation:

⁵⁵ Interview with Serge Toubiana, DVD bonus of *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*. Source: ‘Au début je vois un garçon qui joue. Après je me dis, bon, j’ai compris. Prochaine scène, comme on est habitué. Après, je m’amuse, après, je deviens furieux, après je suis fatigué, et je dis, bon, on va voir... et un moment, je commence à regarder’.

⁵⁶ John David Rhodes, ‘The Spectacle of Skepticism: Haneke’s Long Takes’, in Price and Rhodes (eds), pp. 87–104 (p. 89).

Bei Filmen, wie ich sie mache, mit dieser Offenheit, ist die Gefahr unheimlich groß, daß ich dem Zuschauer, der ja eine Interpretation sucht, einen Schlüssel in die Hand drücke. Das ist kontraproduktiv, weil ich damit das aufhebe, was ich durch meine Dramaturgie herbeiführen will. Wenn mir das passiert, wenn ich selbst eine Deutung gebe, dann ärgere ich mich darüber und werfe mir vor, den ästhetischen Spielraum unnötig eingeschränkt zu haben.⁵⁷

The ping-pong scene is paradigmatic of the way in which Haneke creates a space of speculation; puzzling plot elements leave room for viewers to entertain multiple possibilities simultaneously. The concept of ‘Spielraum’ may be then understood as room-to-play in viewers’ comprehension of an event, as well as the playfulness of the director in not revealing the answers. It represents a key method that Haneke employs in order to deny viewers the ‘schnelle Antworten’ that allow a film to be ‘consumed’.⁵⁸ It stands for a mode of characterisation that is, in Seeßlen’s terms, ‘anti-mythisch, anti-psychologisch und anti-melodramatisch’,⁵⁹ underscored by seemingly mysterious plot twists and turns. Given Kluge’s aforementioned assertion about his wish to strain the muscles of people’s perception, I would consider Haneke’s ‘ästhetischer Spielraum’ a dynamic space that provokes imagination and agency, a means of producing precisely the autonomous mode of spectatorship advocated by Kluge.⁶⁰

In both *71 Fragmente* and *Code Inconnu*, gaps in the narrative are supplemented by formal fragmentation: gaps in framing, gaps in sound, as well as gaps in editing. One critic comments that ‘much of Haneke’s films sound like a TV playing in another room’,⁶¹ an effect achieved by using different techniques: there are scenes in which we see two characters talking

⁵⁷ Assheuer, pp. 32–33.

⁵⁸ Haneke, ‘Film als Katharsis’, p. 89.

⁵⁹ Seeßlen, ‘Strukturen der Verreisung’, p. 48.

⁶⁰ Miriam Hansen writes in detail about the centrality of the idea of ‘Spielraum’ in the second version of Benjamin’s Artwork essay in *Cinema and Experience*, pp. 183–204.

⁶¹ Philip Brophy, ‘Bring the Noise: The Sounds and Silences of Michael Haneke’s *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance*’, *Film Comment*, 42 (2006), 16 (p. 16).

through a window, yet cannot hear what is being said, for example when a gun dealer meets a buyer in a café on a busy street in *71 Fragmente*. We often hear incomplete sentences; the letters that Georges sends to Anne in *Code Inconnu* have neither beginning nor end, for example. When a fragment ends abruptly, we are plunged into silence, effectively underscoring the sense of disconnection between characters as well as between viewer and film. In both films, the motif of the fragment is most evident in the division of the films into sections separated by ‘spacers’; a one-second-long black frame inserted before and after each scene. In *71 Fragmente*, the fragments are disparate and, until the connections between the characters become clear, resemble puzzle pieces, whereby a fragment often relates neither to the fragment preceding or following it. Furthermore, clips of real news footage from five days between 12 October and 23 December 1993 are employed to signpost the chronological structure of the film. The reports cover news from around the world about US intervention in the Somali civil war, IRA bombings, strikes by Air France, Kurdish separatist violence, and so on. The lack of immediate overt relevance to the central narrative demands that viewers reflect on the purpose of their insertion between the story’s fragments. Indeed, through his insertion of an intertitle stating that a student commits murder in a bank at the start of the film, from the outset Haneke challenges the viewer to seek understanding by joining the dots.

This process of making more complex, abstract connections is a further key way in which Haneke reaches out to viewers to stimulate a kind of ‘Dialogfähigkeit’. Indeed, an interview he gave about the film clearly illustrates his intended link between fragmentation and audience engagement. Interviewer Serge Toubiana comments that: ‘Die Idee bei diesem Film ist, dass das Reale fragmentarisch ist. Man kann die Realität nur in Fragmenten begreifen’.⁶² Haneke replies:

⁶² Interview with Serge Toubiana, DVD bonus of *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*.

Ja, man hat nur zu Fragmenten Zugang, weil wir das tagtäglich so erleben. Man sieht sehr wenig, man versteht noch weniger. Und nur beim Mainstream-Kino gibt man immer vor, alles zu wissen. Das langweilt mich. Auch in der Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts, zumindest in der zweiten Hälfte, gibt es keinen Schriftsteller, der es wagt, so zu tun, als wüsste er alles. Man kann nur in der Fragmentierung ehrlich erzählen. Man zeigt kleine Stücke, und die Summe dieser Stücke eröffnet dem Zuschauer die Möglichkeit zu wählen und mit seinen eigenen Erfahrungen zu arbeiten. Das bedeutet, den Zuschauer dazu zu bringen, seine Denk- und Gefühlsmaschine in Gang zu setzen.⁶³

In *Code Inconnu*, too, we can identify ways that Haneke seeks to stimulate viewers' critical faculties. Whilst its narrative is easier to follow than that of *71 Fragmente*, the integration of additional images and sequences into the story requires a certain amount of deciphering on the part of the viewer. For example, we see Anne shooting a horror film, yet at times it is unclear whether we are watching the film *Code Inconnu* or the film-within-the-film. In one scene, we see Anne enter a large, high-ceilinged room accompanied by a man dressed in black. In front of them is a film crew of three, gradually moving backwards as they walk forwards, filming their conversation (Fig. 37). We then see a shot of the two characters from the perspective of the camera we just saw filming them (Fig. 38), that is, we see the horror film from the perspective of a cinema audience. The scene that is being filmed is cut (Fig. 39), and then resumed.

Likewise, later in the film we see another scene from the horror film. Again, we are given no indication that we are seeing a film-within-a-film until the image is paused and revealed to be a projection of the horror film watched by Anne and her fellow actor in order to re-record the sound in the scene. Also interwoven into the narrative are sequences of still photographs taken by Georges: at the start of the film the sequence comprises images from Kosovo, and towards the end there is a sequence of black-and-white portraits of underground passengers he has taken clandestinely. Over each of these sections we hear Georges read letters he has written to Anne, the first from his time covering the war in Kosovo, and the second from a trip to Afghanistan. The result of this collection of different images and contexts is that

⁶³ Interview with Serge Toubiana, DVD bonus of *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*.

it is not immediately clear which authorial voice is ‘speaking’ in many of the fragments. By seamlessly cutting between the film and the film-within-the-film, Haneke encourages viewers to imagine the unseen cameras, boom operators and a director who together create the images in *Code Inconnu*; the film draws attention to the artificial nature of its own existence and discourages viewers from suspending their disbelief, and thereby prevents the unquestioning ‘consumption’ of the film.

As well as the active spectatorship that the director seeks to evoke using formal fragmentation, the above statement by Haneke reveals a further way in which *71 Fragmente* and *Code Inconnu* may be read productively through Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge. Whilst Kracauer becomes frustrated with the illusion of completeness in feature films, Benjamin and Kluge extend their critique to the way that the world is simplified and shaped into wholes in other media, too.⁶⁴ At the same time that Benjamin was working on revisions of the *Kunstwerk* essay for its publication in French in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, he was also completing an essay on storytelling and the works of the Russian novelist Nikolai Leskov.⁶⁵ He writes that a new form of communication – information – has superseded traditional forms of storytelling, and brought with it a more superficial way of engaging with the world. He holds up the relationship between storyteller and listener as paradigmatic of the capacity to experience and understand. With a great storyteller, like Leskov:

Das Außerordentliche, das Wunderbare wird mit der größten Genauigkeit erzählt, der psychologische Zusammenhang des Geschehens aber wird dem Leser nicht aufgedrängt. Es ist ihm freigestellt, sich die Sache zurechtzulegen, wie er sie versteht, und damit erreicht das Erzählte eine Schwingungsbreite, die der Information fehlt.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Tara Forrest also notes the crossovers between Benjamin and Kluge in relation to storytelling. *The Politics of Imagination*, pp. 154–159, and Forrest, ‘A Negative Utopia: Michael Haneke’s Fragmentary Cinema’, in Terri Ginsberg, and Andrea Mensch, *A Companion to German Cinema* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2012), pp. 553–572.

⁶⁵ See the editorial notes in Walter Benjamin, *GS* 2, p. 1277.

⁶⁶ Walter Benjamin, ‘Der Erzähler’ (1936), in *GS* 2, pp. 438–464 (p. 445).

In reference to the rapid dissemination of news from all over the globe (information), Benjamin writes that:

beinah nichts mehr, was geschieht, kommt der Erzählung, beinah alles der Information zugute. *Es ist nämlich schon die halbe Kunst des Erzählens, eine Geschichte, indem man sie wiedergibt, von Erklärungen freizuhalten.*⁶⁷

With information, there is no room for complexity or backstories: ‘Die Information aber macht den Anspruch auf prompte Nachprüfbarkeit. Da ist es das erste, daß sie “an und für sich verständlich” auftritt’.⁶⁸

The continued relevance of Benjamin’s observations from 1936 is clear: Haneke’s assertion that fragmentation offers an ‘honest’ way of engaging with the world may also be considered as a comment on media culture in an age of advanced capitalism. Both films engage with the dissemination of news and information – *71 Fragmente* is based on a story that Haneke encountered in the papers and takes a news clipping as its starting point, and Georges’s photographs and letters from Kosovo and Afghanistan represent the relaying of news as information and images in *Code Inconnu*. I suggest that the films also represent a plea for more nuanced way of depicting reality as a counterpoint to the simplified, digestible news stories that are presented to the public. In *71 Fragmente*, for example, Haneke renders the snippet of information presented at the start of the film (‘Am 23.12.93 erschöß der 19-jährige Student Maximilian B. in der Zweigstelle einer Wiener Bank drei Menschen und tötete sich kurz darauf selbst mit einem Schuß in dem Kopf’) significantly more complex than it appears. He transforms the three people from objects to subjects, from victims of Max’s crime to people with families, backgrounds, and problems of their own. He considers this apparent case of

⁶⁷ Benjamin, ‘Der Erzähler’, p. 445. Emphasis mine.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

running amok outside of vacuum, implicating the society in which Maximilian B. lives. In Benjamin's terms, then, Haneke may be seen as engaging with a 'Kunst des Erzählens' that stands in opposition to the way that stories are told not only in 'amerikanisches Überrumpelungskino', but in other media, too.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Michael Haneke meets the demands laid out by Kracauer, Benjamin and Kluge concerning political cinema in a number of ways. Both *71 Fragmente* and *Code Inconnu* eschew the illusion of wholeness: the puzzling elements of the narratives – Maximilian's motivations, the reason(s) for the Nohals' despair, the dynamics of Georges and Anne's relationship, and so on – are left unresolved, and the various manifestations of emotional glaciation may not be attributed to any single cause, but wax and wane, implying a perpetual state of isolation and alienation. As Peucker comments: 'keeping in mind Haneke's insistence on the identity of form and content, we can speculate that the fragmented body of [*71 Fragmente*] emblemizes the rift in the contemporary Austrian family as Haneke portrays it'.⁶⁹ Thus a further point of intersection between Haneke and the three theorists is the emphasis on form as a means of reflecting the fragmented protagonists in both *71 Fragmente* and *Code Inconnu*.

Yet I suggest that the 'fragmented body' serves more than a mimetic function: its politics lie precisely in Haneke's aim of transforming the viewer through the films' fragmented forms. In an echo of the imperative to awaken the critical faculties of the spectator described by Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge, the director intends for the viewer to activate his or her 'Denk- und Gefühlsmaschine' *him or herself*. There is thus the implication that Haneke, like Kant, regards the viewer's immaturity as a state that can be actively overcome if confronted

⁶⁹ Peucker, p. 187.

with the right kind of stimulation. With this in mind, we might conceive the ‘ästhetischer Spielraum’ that Haneke creates through the use of formal and narrative fragmentation – a space in which the viewer is encouraged to speculate as to the motivations of characters, to search for connections, to seek understanding by drawing upon his or her own experiences – as a site of incipient enlightenment. In the following chapter, I examine other ways – in addition to presenting an intellectual challenge – in which film can stimulate active spectatorship according to Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge, and consider in greater detail why they maintain that this task is so urgent.

CHAPTER FIVE

SENSITIVE SUBJECTS: SHOCK AND DISTRACTION IN *HUNDSTAGE* (2001) BY ULRICH SEIDL, AND IN *SEHNSUCHT* (2006) BY VALESKA GRISEBACH¹

National Socialism represents a direct and indirect impetus for the championing of film as a political medium by Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge. The notion that moving images can function as a powerful tool against fascist ideology binds the theoretical threads of the three previous chapters; cinema becomes a space for different kinds of representation – the worker as a subject with agency – and for other narratives of truth. The present chapter follows on from the previous chapter, in that it is based on the theoretical trope common to Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge that the modern subject is alienated and therefore vulnerable to manipulation to destructive ends. In Chapter Four I argue that Michael Haneke employs strategies of fragmentation that demand an active, engaged viewing position. The ‘mündige/r Zuschauer/in’² that his films seek to awaken is, then, better equipped to engage critically with a film’s subject and with his or her own reality. This chapter also takes as its starting point the thinkers’ concerns about the distracted state of the modern psyche, drawing in particular on Benjamin’s notion of the filmic ‘Schockwirkung’³ as a means of creating a more alert – and

¹ Parts of this chapter will appear in an article entitled ‘Violence in the Age of Digital Reproducibility: Political Form in Valeska Grisebach’s *Longing* (2006)’, *Zeitgeist* Special Edition of *German Politics & Society* (forthcoming in spring 2015).

² Alexander Kluge, ‘Der Zuschauer als Unternehmer’, in Alexander Kluge, *Die Patriotin* (Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins, 1979). pp. 300–301 (p. 300).

³ Walter Benjamin, ‘Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit’, in *GS* 1, pp. 471–508 (p. 503, 503, footnote 29 and *passim*).

ultimately political – spectator. Whereas Chapter Four considers how Haneke’s two films demand viewers’ attention on an intellectual level, the present chapter is more concerned with how contemporary filmmakers introduce political potential into the visceral, *physical* experience of the moving image.

My argument in this chapter is anchored in Benjamin’s observations on changes in apperception and his notion of shock, but it is not a one-to-one application of theory to filmic analysis. Rather, I maintain that his assertion of the direct link between experiential poverty (‘sensory-perceptual alienation’⁴) and violent catastrophe (on a social and individual level) in the *Kunstwerk* essay, and the urgency of this claim, provide an illuminating framework within which to read Ulrich Seidl’s *Hundstage* and Valeska Grisebach’s *Sehnsucht*. Far from the bright lights of Berlin, Paris, and the other metropolises of Benjamin’s observations, these films are set in suburban Austria and rural Germany, respectively. Yet I argue that the way that the films deal with violence – in form and in content – points to continuities between the imperative expressed in Benjamin’s epilogue and contemporary filmmaking practices. I identify a concern on the part of the directors with film as a transformative medium and film as an art form that can not only challenge viewers intellectually, but that can stimulate a heightened sense of perception and thus transform viewers into more alert, sensitive and ethically responsible subjects. I will refer to the directors’ ‘politics of sensitivity’ since for Benjamin, as for Kracauer and Kluge, this is a profoundly political endeavour.

⁴ Miriam Bratu Hansen, *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), p. 91.

SENSORY ALIENATION AND VIOLENCE IN BENJAMIN'S *KUNSTWERK* ESSAY

Influenced by his understanding of political philosophy (Marx), psychoanalysis (Freud) and sociology (Simmel), Benjamin believes that changes to apperception have been induced by the experience of modernity in its various guises: modern warfare, modern modes of production, and new leisure activities that are designed to overwhelm the senses. In his text 'Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire', Benjamin cites Freud:

Für den lebenden Organismus ist der Reizschutz eine beinahe wichtigere Aufgabe als die Reizaufnahme; er ist mit einem eigenen Energievorrat ausgestattet und muß vor allem bestrebt sein, die besonderen Formen der Energieumsetzung, die in ihm spielen, vor dem gleichmachenden, also zerstörenden Einfluß der übergroßen, draußen arbeitenden Energien zu bewahren.⁵

The modern subject is not entirely alert to his or her surroundings due to the protective outer shell ('Reizschutz') that he or she is developing. Benjamin forges a connection between this alienated condition and the modernity of industrialised capitalism in different ways: the factory worker, no longer in control of his or her actions, necessarily operates in a state of distraction. Susan Buck-Morss writes:

The factory system, injuring every one of the human senses, paralyzes the imagination of the worker. His or her work is 'sealed off from experience'; memory is replaced by conditioned response, learning by 'drill', skill by repetition.⁶

Indeed, in order to navigate the tasks required for daily existence, Benjamin argues, all those living in a big city have unconsciously adapted their mode of perception so as not to react to

⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*, 3rd edn. (Vienna: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1923), p. 31, quoted in Walter Benjamin, 'Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire' (1937/38), *GS* 1, pp. 605–645 (p. 613, footnote 9).

⁶ Susan Buck-Morss, 'Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered', in *October*, 62 (1992), 3–41 (p. 17).

every aural or visual stimulus with the same degree of intensity.⁷ The protective shield to which Freud refers – ‘das menschliche Sensorium’ – has changed drastically in modernity and has produced a populace that has necessarily relinquished the capacity to experience.

This is where cinema comes in. For Benjamin, film is the art form most appropriate to this modern condition:

Der Film ist die der gesteigerten Lebensgefahr, der die Heutigen ins Auge zu sehen haben, entsprechende Kunstform. [...] Der Film entspricht tiefgreifenden Veränderungen des Apperzeptionsapparates – Veränderungen, wie sie im Maßstab der Privatexistenz jeder Passant im Großstadtverkehr, wie sie im geschichtlichen Maßstab jeder heutige Staatsbürger erlebt.⁸

Unlike bourgeois art forms, which demand absorption and contemplation, film is received in a state of collective distraction, thus reflecting the status quo outside of the cinema. Further, and central to Benjamin’s argument, is the idea that the ‘Chockwirkung’ of some kinds of montage can mimic the everyday stimuli that viewers encounter in the factory or on the street. He sees great political potential in filmic mimesis; the critical passage in the *Kunstwerk* essay reads as follows:

*Die Rezeption in der Zerstreuung, die sich mit wachsendem Nachdruck auf allen Gebieten der Kunst bemerkbar macht und das Symptom von tiefgreifenden Veränderungen der Apperzeption ist, hat am Film ihr eigentliches Übungsinstrument. In seiner Chockwirkung kommt der Film dieser Rezeptionsform entgegen.*⁹

Whilst reception in a state of distraction is an inevitable effect of modernity, film is capable of reacting to this altered condition. Here, I would like to give a short overview of some of the key

⁷ See Benjamin’s description of Paris in ‘Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire’, p. 630.

⁸ Walter Benjamin, ‘Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit’, p. 503, footnote 29.

⁹ Benjamin, ‘Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit’, p. 505. Emphasis in original.

ideas relating to Benjamin's concept of shock. Firstly, his understanding of filmic shock is double-edged, which Thomas Levin summarises as follows:

The shock-quality of the montage in certain types of filmic image-sequences is crucial for Benjamin because, on the one hand, they correspond to a collective, distracted model of reception that serves as an alternative to the individual absorption of the bourgeoisie's cult of art.

At the same time, it “routinizes” the spectator for the staccato sense-perceptions that are so pervasive in late industrial culture, thereby serving as a kind of “training” for the new tempo and quality of experience in late capitalist urbanism’.¹⁰ Thus, as Levin states, the role of film is complex, as it is ‘cast alternately as a *symptom* or *embodiment* of, or as a *school* for’¹¹ the ‘Umfunktionierung des menschlichen Apperzeptionsapparats’.¹²

Levin also argues that this ‘routinizing’ does not play a normative or ‘quietist’ role, that is, it does not serve merely to allow viewers to adapt to their alienated state rather than looking to change the conditions that produced it. Rather, ‘shock training by the cinema can be read as preparation for a new technical mastery that could, at least potentially, be enlisted in the service of a progressive project’.¹³ The form that this ‘progressive project’ might take – that is, the true potential of the ‘Chockwirkung’ – is in many ways the crux of the *Kunstwerk* essay. One way of interpreting the benefits of shock is to consider the parallels between Benjamin and Brecht: the capacity for the camera to ‘train’ viewers echoes Brecht’s advocacy of a theatre that tests its audience. The idea of shock and interruption – the breaking down of a whole into its individual pieces – thus opens up political potential in a Brechtian manner. Howard Eiland

¹⁰ Thomas Levin, ‘Film’, in Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproduceability and Other Writings on Media* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 315–322 (p. 317).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 316. Emphasis in original.

¹² See editorial notes in *GS* 1, pp. 982–1063 (p. 1049).

¹³ Levin, ‘Film’, p. 318.

writes:

In theory at least, the spacing out of the elements, their emerging disparateness, makes for a recurrent shock effect – a hallmark of montage – and it is this shock-engendered form, by means of which situations are set off against one another, that creates a transitory space in which contradictions in social conditions can present themselves and society's causal network can be traced.¹⁴

Yet, unlike Brecht, Benjamin also sees the dialectical potential in the distracted state of an audience, which is a necessary standpoint to take, perhaps, given that he considers reception in distraction an unchangeable condition. Eiland continues:

The essay on technological reproducibility makes it evident that distraction, in a properly modern context, must itself be understood dialectically – that is to say, beyond the simple opposition of distraction and concentration [...]. The challenge, Benjamin suggests [...], is to appreciate 'the values of distraction', which he associates with a convergence of educational value and consumer value in a new kind of learning.¹⁵

Eiland, like Levin, sees Benjamin's goal as being to exploit the capacity for montage to create shocks in a way that productively 'trains' the distracted masses in a new 'quality of experience' (Levin) and a new 'kind of learning' (Eiland).

However, this chapter shall focus on a second interpretation of the relationship between distraction, sensory alienation and shock. Susan Buck-Morss and Miriam Hansen draw a clear line between the changes in apperception that Benjamin outlines in the body of the essay and his urgent call in the epilogue to politicise art in order to counteract the potentially dangerous effects of fascism. Hansen writes:

¹⁴ Howard Eiland, 'Reception in Distraction', in *Walter Benjamin and Art*, ed. by Andrew Benjamin (London: Continuum, 2005), pp. 3–13 (p. 5).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

In an almost utilitarian sense, he considers it the ‘historical task’ of film to train human beings in the forms of apperception and attention required in an increasingly machinic world [...]. But in addition to this training function, he also imputed to cinema the therapeutic potential to counter, if not undo, the sensory alienation inflicted by industrial-capitalist modernity, to diffuse the pathological consequences of the failed reception of technology on a mass scale’.¹⁶

By referencing the ‘pathological consequences’ for an alienated populace, Hansen draws a strong line between sensory alienation and the capacity to inflict violence, an interpretation that is best rehearsed in Susan Buck-Morss’ essay on ‘Aesthetics and Anaesthetics’.¹⁷ Further, according to these readings of the essay, the filmic ‘Chockwirkung’ works to re-sensitise the viewing masses by jolting spectators out of a state of political apathy. Both Hansen and Buck-Morss refer to Benjamin’s term ‘innervation’ to describe the ‘therapeutic potential’ of film technology positively to affect the viewing subject:

Benjamin, unlike Freud, understood innervation as a two-way process or transfer [...]. This possibility implies that the protective shield against stimuli, the precarious boundary or rind of the bodily ego, could be imagined less as a carapace or armour, than as a matrix – a porous interface between the organism and the world that would allow for a greater mobility and circulation of psychic energies.¹⁸

Thus, Benjamin’s assumption is that the heightened presence of mind and body created by shocks will benefit humanity as a whole.

As Kluge affirms, Benjamin’s theory does not pertain to sudden content-based shocking impulses, but to the fragmented nature of the moving image; that the streams of changing visual and audio impressions (the inherent quality of montage) mimic the stimuli of daily life and thus encapsulate the ‘shock’.¹⁹ For the purpose of this chapter, however, I

¹⁶ Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, p. 132.

¹⁷ Buck-Morss, ‘Aesthetics and Anaesthetics’, pp. 3–41.

¹⁸ Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, p. 137.

¹⁹ Author interview with Alexander Kluge, May 2014.

interpret Benjamin's shock theory in different ways in order to show how his underlying assumption of a link between sensory alienation and violence – and the idea that films can 'train' viewers in becoming more sensitive to their surroundings – offers a fruitful standpoint from which to consider the German-language films discussed in the following. I draw upon the concept of shock on different levels – shocks that viewers may experience in the narrative, potentially shocking viewing positions, and, closest to the Benjaminian understanding, shocks that occur independently of the storyline and that may affect viewers on a non-cognitive level.

BANALITY AND BARBARISM IN *HUNDSTAGE*

When presenting his first feature film after a twenty-year career of documentary filmmaking, Ulrich Seidl famously wished his audience 'a disturbing evening'.²⁰ Whilst critics' reactions to the film include descriptions such as 'unpleasant' and 'seedy and cruel',²¹ there is a general consensus that the distaste Seidl's films may arouse in viewers is by no means negative. Stefan Grisseemann notes that *Hundstage* marks a breakthrough in the Austrian director's career: 'ab nun sind die internationalen Kritiken zu Seidls Arbeit fast durchwegs hymnisch'.²² With over 100,000 viewers in Austria, it was the second-largest grossing film in 2002, and attracted a larger audience than Haneke's prize-winning *Die Klavierspielerin* from the previous year.²³ Since he received the Grand Jury Prize at Venice in 2001 for *Hundstage*, Seidl's attendance at festivals has become a regular and anticipated event. For critic and film theorist Georg Seeßlen, the distinct aesthetic of *Hundstage* is significant: '*Hundstage* ist vielleicht kein angenehmer, aber ein

²⁰ Mattias Frey, 'The Possibility of Desire in a Conformist World: The Cinema of Ulrich Seidl', in *New Austrian Film*, ed. by Robert von Dassanowsky and Oliver C. Speck (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), pp. 189–198 (p. 189).

²¹ Richard Falcon, 'Cruel Intentions', *Sight and Sound*, 11 (September 2002), 52–53 (p. 52).

²² Stefan Grisseemann, *Sündenfall: Die Grenzüberschreitungen des Filmemachers Ulrich Seidl* (Vienna: Sonderzahl, 2007), p. 182.

²³ Information compiled by Rentrak und Österreichisches Filminstitut, <www.filmaustria.com/kino-charts.htm> [accessed August 2014].

großer Film. Einer von denen, die mit der Zukunft des Kinos zu tun haben'.²⁴ I argue that reading the film through Benjamin can help explain what it has to do with the *future* of cinema, and allow us to draw some conclusions about the wider function of film – and how it relates to experience – in the twenty-first century.

Like Benjamin, Seidl offers a representation of a modern subject who is beset by numbness and incapable of connecting with others. The 'dog days' refer to the period between 24 July and the 23 August, a time when temperatures can become extremely high. Oppressive, inescapable heat, the weekend and the suburban location are the three principal elements of the setting that facilitate Seidl's exploration of alienated, lost souls. The director has spoken about the tendency for people to react to extreme heat with apathy or aggression and, referring to the behaviour of Seidl's protagonists over the course of a weekend during these dog days, Justin Vicari comments that the characters 'always seem to hover at extremes of banality or barbarism'.²⁵ The heat restricts the characters' capacity to undertake activities that would distract them from boredom. The second element of Seidl's episodic story is the weekend: the filmmaker has spoken in interviews about how most conflicts take place and most suicides occur during leisure time.²⁶ Accordingly, the film takes place from Saturday morning to Sunday evening, ending before the characters return to their working lives. Free time is not a source of relaxation or enjoyment for them, but rather a source of torture as they are forced to negotiate the dysfunctional relationships that they are able to avoid during the week. The third ingredient for the 'disturbing' film is where it is set: in a suburb south of Vienna. Although the location is the only one of the three elements that is permanent, Seidl nevertheless creates the oppressive atmosphere in such a way that suggests that even when the

²⁴ Georg Seeßlen, 'Hundstage', *epd Film*, 19 (2002), 36–37 (p. 37).

²⁵ Justin Vicari, 'The *Fin-de-siècle* Vision of Ulrich Seidl's *Dog Days*', in Dassanowsky and Speck, (eds), pp. 199–206 (p. 200).

²⁶ Katharina Dockhorn, 'Gespräch mit Ulrich Seidl', *epd Film*, 19 (2002), 37–38 (p. 38), and Michel Ciment, 'Entretien Ulrich Seidl: "L'anormalité n'existe pas"', *Positif*, 500 (2002), 196–199 (p. 196).

heat fades and the working week begins, the characters are not likely to be any less alienated from themselves or each other. The heat and the weekend merely aggravate the situation; we are then forced to look for other indications; further factors of misery, so to speak.

Among the tall concrete apartment buildings, housing estates, dual carriageways, car parks and shopping malls we follow six different stories over the course of 48 hours: club dancer Claudia and her violently jealous boyfriend, Mario; Herr and Frau Theodorakis, an estranged couple coping poorly with the death of their young daughter by using tennis and sex respectively; the elderly widower Herr Walter and his erotic advances towards his housekeeper on what would be the fiftieth anniversary of his marriage to his late wife; Herr Hruby, the nosy security specialist who is called upon by residents of the suburb to find out who has been keying their brand new cars; Anna, the hitchhiker with learning disabilities who asks to be taken for rides by different people, only to serenade them with advertising jingles and ask uncomfortable, overly personal questions; and finally, a female character we know only as the teacher, and her boyfriend and strip club owner Wickerl, who taunts and abuses her. The tables are turned on Wickerl by his younger male friend, Lucky, who tortures him out of a misplaced sense of solidarity and romantic bravado towards the teacher. Together, these storylines contribute to an exploration of different facets of life in these Austrian suburbs, with what seems to be an overwhelmingly bleak outlook. Broken relationships and emotional and physical suffering are the norm.

Seidl originally planned more episodes with different characters, as well as more narrative events, and even filmed an ending to the Claudia/Mario storyline that involved Claudia watching a television report about Mario's death in a car crash. However, Seidl chose not to include this scene as it felt like 'ein Fremdkörper, weil es zu viel Fiktion war'.²⁷ Indeed, although there are clear content-based markers, the different storylines do not peak with a

²⁷ Nicolas Wackerbath and Christoph Hochhäusler, 'Die Methode Seidl', in *Revolver: Kino muss gefährlich sein*, ed. by Marcus Seibert (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Autoren, 2006), pp. 329–341 (p. 331).

single incident, but rather undulate between moments of banality and barbarity, in Vicari's terms. That the stories take place over a weekend gives the film a cyclical feel, a sense that Seidl is tapping into a *Stimmung*, or a matrix of *Stimmungen*, that is perpetual: the film does not purport to tell a story, but rather to offer a portrait of a specific milieu.

Seidl's aversion to 'zu viel Fiktion' is also evident in his filmmaking approach: 'Ich mache nie einen Unterschied zwischen Dokumentar- und Spielfilm. Diese Frage stellt sich für mich nicht. Wo soll denn da die Grenze liegen?'²⁸ he has said, and he demonstrates a concern for authenticity in *Hundstage*. As is the case in a number of other films I look at in this thesis, the cast is composed of non-professional actors with the exception of Anna (Maria Hofstätter), the teacher (Christine Jirku), Lucky (Georg Friedrich), and Frau Theodorakis (Claudia Martini). The stories were inspired by material that Seidl had collected from different real-life encounters over years, and ideas that he and his co-writer Veronika Franz created together. Once he had cast the parts, he observed the non-professional actors in their daily activities and incorporated his findings into the script. He discovered Alfred Mrva, who plays Hruby, in the phone directory, for example: 'The final result is a combination of their role and their actual personality'.²⁹ Though Seidl and Franz plotted the script, the dialogue was largely improvised. As with Andreas Dresen's *Halt auf freier Strecke*, then, the actors were given no more than a description of what was to happen in the scene.³⁰ Seidl took other precautions to ensure a high degree of authenticity. For example, he and his crew only filmed when the temperature rose above 34 degrees Celsius, and a heater was used when shooting indoors, guaranteeing a palpable sense of bodies that are pushed to their limits. Seidl also shot the film chronologically

²⁸ Marget Köhler, 'Wirklichkeit provoziert: Gespräch mit Ulrich Seidl über *Hundstage*', *film-dienst*, 55 (2002), 42–43 (p. 43).

²⁹ Ciment, p. 197. Source: 'Le résultat final est un mélange de leur rôle et de leur personnalité'. All translations from French in this chapter are my own.

³⁰ Dockhorn, p. 37.

in order to leave space for natural progression or variation, claiming that this method ‘guarantees psychological authenticity and truthful character development’.³¹

We might then ask what constitutes psychological authenticity for Seidl. Communication breakdown between numb characters is conveyed using a number of different narrative and visual strategies in *Hundstage*. Fences, doors, roll-down blinds and surveillance systems clearly delineate territory in the film and replace interaction with signals of distrust and reserve. We see Herr Walter, for example, within the parameters of his garden, trimming his hedgerow and watering his plants. His land is enclosed by hedges, tarpaulin, and concrete; its different sections are demarcated by meticulously maintained concrete paths and flowerbeds encircled by wooden fences of uniform size. He expresses his anger at his neighbours’ raised voices by first threatening to report the faceless culprits to the police, and then finally by turning on his lawnmower and leaving it stationary next to the fence in order to drown out the sound of the fighting. He then goes indoors, closes the door and lets down the shutter, which is a recurring image throughout the film (Figs. 40–42).

More than once, the lowering of the white plastic blinds functions as a stark symbol of emotional self-barricading. When Claudia closes the shutters to the balcony of the house that she lives in with her mother (Fig. 41), we have already observed the abuse she has suffered at the hands of her boyfriend the night before, as well as the absence of a loving rapport between her and her mother. The best example of failed affect, however, is the relationship between Herr and Frau Theodorakis, which is coloured by the continual closing of doors. In one scene, Frau Theodorakis is lying on the veranda sunning herself; her husband emerges through the veranda doors, sees her, goes back inside, and closes the shutters (Fig. 42). This sequence encapsulates the couple’s dynamic: she seeks escape from the horror of family life without their daughter through anonymous swinging parties and sex with her masseur; he paces from one

³¹ Ciment, p. 197. Source: ‘le garant de l’authenticité psychologique, de la vérité de l’évolution des personnages’.

space in their home to the next, bouncing a tennis ball against the walls and doors and doing pull-ups for release. Their shared bereavement has not brought them together. Neither acknowledges the other's existence as they each, in turn, take flowers to the site of their daughter's death at a roadside. They live side by side, occupying different rooms of the house, encountering one another outside, or in the bathroom and kitchen as ghosts, with a Chinese wall between them. As Frau Theodorakis and her masseur disappear into her room, closing the door behind them, Herr Theodorakis emerges from another door, then listens, silently, with his ear to the door of her room. Although no word passes between them, he makes his presence known by bouncing a tennis ball loudly, by watching them as they eat dinner, and by sharing the same space with his wife and her lover. He functions as a snag in her otherwise successful programme of distraction. Towards the end of the film, after the masseur has left and Sunday evening is approaching, she stands over him as he lies on the sofa in the living room. Here, we see evidence that her programme of self-distraction is breaking down: 'Mirkus, reden wir mit einander? Du, rede mal mit mir',³² she says, as he stares unresponsively at the ceiling. She hits him, begging him to talk to her.

Further evidence of the numb and distracted subject can be identified in *Hundstage*, strengthening the link between Benjamin and Seidl. Cyclical behaviour patterns on different levels imbue the film's characters with a sense of hopelessness and futility. Herr Theodorakis' ball bouncing is perhaps the most literal example of this; his self-confinement to the cellar and his peering through a window at the neighbours' lawnmower moving in circles are two of many repeated references to the sense of entrapment and inevitability in his situation. The fish tank in the couple's living room offers a near-perfect visual symbol of this, the only difference between the Herr Theodorakis and the fish being, of course, the possibility of escape. Yet Seidl's characters also seem unable to exercise their free will, as demonstrated in the cycles of

³² All quotations from the film refer to *Hundstage*, dir. by Ulrich Seidl (Alamode film, 2001).

violence in the film. Seeßlen has commented that '[Seidl] beschäftigt [...] der Zusammenhang zwischen dem, was uns kaputt macht, und dem, was wir kaputt machen',³³ and there are indeed some larger questions in play regarding agency.

For Benjamin, the distracted, alienated state of the modern subject is the result of a process, a series of transformations that have led to '*tiefgreifenden Veränderungen der Apperzeption*'.³⁴ Like Haneke, Seidl does not overtly point towards any processes that may have led to the characters' self-defeating behavioural patterns or communication breakdowns in the film. They are presented simply as the status quo; as Georg Seeßlen comments, 'Die Menschen in *Hundstage* sind überlastet und wissen nicht wovon'.³⁵ Rather, we as spectators have to untangle the web of causality for ourselves. Seidl has spoken about a kind of solitude that he believes beleaguers Western European societies:

For me, solitude means the inability to communicate, the inability to love, and the inability to leave a prison. A paradox in contemporary societies is that we are becoming increasingly solitary as the modes of communication are multiplying.³⁶

In a different interview he adds: 'wir kommunizieren unaufhörlich, aber irgendwie werden wir nicht glücklicher'.³⁷ *Hundstage* certainly presents us with characters who are incapable of communicating, of loving, or of escaping their prisons. Moreover – and this links Seidl to Benjamin – the film also addresses the reception of media and modes of communication in advanced capitalism, and thereby also hints at causality.

³³ Seeßlen, 'Hundstage', p. 36.

³⁴ Benjamin, 'Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit', p. 505. Emphasis in original.

³⁵ Seeßlen, 'Hundstage', p. 36.

³⁶ Ciment, p. 198. Source: 'La solitude pour moi, c'est l'incapacité de communiquer, l'incapacité d'aimer et l'incapacité de sortir d'une prison. Ce qui est paradoxal dans nos sociétés contemporaines, c'est que l'homme est de plus en plus solitaire alors que les moyens de communication se multiplient'.

³⁷ Dockhorn, p. 38.

Seidl, like Benjamin, is interested in the correlation between the modulations of capitalism – its shapes and spaces, its spheres of influence, its modes of communication – and a numbness in experience, a state of shallow affect. A kind of information overload may be a contributing factor in the solitary state of the characters. This is most clear in the character of the hitchhiker, Anna, whom we first encounter in the car park of the ‘Billa’ supermarket. With a tone that hovers between accusation and curiosity, she approaches a man in front of his car and asks him what he has bought, and proceeds to reel off the ingredients for the ‘Extra-Wurst’ in his hand: ‘Nitrit-Pökel-Salz, Ascorbinsäure, Anti-toxidationsmittel, Di-, Tri-Polysulfate, das ist alle in der Extra-Wurst drin’. As he gets into his car and pulls away, she recites the top ten supermarkets through his window, impervious to his lack of interest. Anna approaches numerous car drivers and asks them to take her for a ride. Usually sitting in the back seat, she bombards the men, women and couples with advertising jingles (‘Haka bringt die neue Küche in nur neun Tagen, maßgenau und fertig ist sie da’, sung to the tune of the can-can), top ten lists (‘Kennt ihr die zehn beliebtesten Haustiere?’), uncomfortable questions (‘Wieviel wiegst du denn?’ ‘Wie alt bist du schon? Du bist schon alt, gel? Hast du noch die Regel?’), or simply stares at them, chewing gum.

These are messages that are familiar yet made strange by Anna; the personal questions are, of course, also linked with consumerism in modern capitalism, as she vocalises the kind of insecurities generated to keep dieting and beauty industries afloat. In one scene, she is picked up by the driver of a red convertible. The blond-haired man engages with Anna more than others, asking her to repeat the jingle so that he can sing it with her. The camera tracks the background as they travel along new-looking roads with young trees in the middle, past *Teppichland*, *FliesenCity*, *Forstinger*, *Eurospar*, *Sports Experts*, *MakroMarkt*, and other out-of-town commercial shopping centres. He allows her to play her favourite song, the *Schlager* song ‘Monja’ from the cassette she carries with her; she sings along, and looks directly into the

camera with an expression of total joy, a jarring moment for the viewer (Fig. 43). Though her expression is open, this breaking of the fourth wall functions as a challenge to spectators. It is as if Anna is asking, ‘How far could I push you? Am I making you uncomfortable, too?’

Whilst the superficial nature of her subject choices and her child-like demeanour might suggest a light-heartedness to her interactions, this is certainly not the case. The drivers are not actors and were not informed about the film: they were merely told that they were to pick up a hitchhiker and react as they would in real life. Maria Hofstätter was given the following task: ‘Die Leute zu durchschauen, ihre wunden Punkte zu finden’.³⁸ Her chauffeurs become increasingly irritated by the incessant questioning and crossing of their personal boundaries. Seidl turns a magnifying glass on to the danger to which female hitchhikers in particular are exposed, as the drivers react aggressively, sometimes violently forcing her out of their cars when she refuses to leave. Hruby eventually picks up Anna and incarcerates her in an apartment, telling the victims of car vandalism that he has identified her as the culprit. He invites them to ‘punish’ her, which ultimately results in her rape by one of the local men.

Justin Vicari argues that the fate of the hitchhiker is a metaphor for ‘the destructive energies of capitalism’:

She lives by the slogans and catchphrases used to sell products and hype celebrities [...]. In the end, a salesman, a key player in the economic system, turns on her and brings about her destruction. Is Seidl suggesting that the market economy always rises up against its own adherents and hangers-on [...]?³⁹

Whether Anna is truly an adherent of the market economy is questionable, for she is in many respects economically outside of the system, neither owning a car nor purchasing goods from the shops whose jingles she sings. She may be considered rather as a puppet for inauthentic

³⁸ Wackerbath and Höchhäusler, ‘Die Methode Seidl’ p. 334.

³⁹ Vicari, p. 202.

communication, a hyperbolic example of the would-be consumer-subject who is saturated with the messages bombarded by the media. Read through Benjamin, we might also consider her as an individual who has not fully developed the protective shield against the onslaught of stimuli from television, radio, billboard advertising, and so on, the way that the other characters in *Hundstage* have done. Anna has not managed to inhibit the values of the belief system by which the others silently live; she is zealous in imparting the messages to anyone who will listen. I would, however, agree with Vicari on the significance of Hraby as the facilitator of Anna's rape, but because of his role as representative of security and surveillance rather than his job in sales. A perverted logic is rehearsed and exposed whereby a security salesman violates the personal security of a woman in order to make the suburbs a safer place.

The architectural forms in the film also create a link between an alienated populace and advanced capitalism, thus providing a further way in which Seidl may be read as 'updating' Benjamin's argument about the distracted condition of the modern subject. The phantasmagoria of Baudelaire's Paris that Benjamin describes – and to which he attributes the overstimulation of the city-dweller – has not been replaced by the concert houses, shopping boulevards and iconic old streets of twenty-first century Viennese city life in *Hundstage*. Rather, this is a Vienna of large concrete car parks, of out-of-town industrial and commercial complexes, of prefabricated houses and housing estates, of garages and swimming pools. These are Marc Augé's non-places – they could be the suburbs of any European city. Hraby is our tour guide to a landscape that is, as Vicari observes, both dehumanised and dehumanising.⁴⁰ The surveillance expert travels from one housing estate to the next, stopping to peddle his security systems, to listen to residents complain, and to wipe the sweat from his torso and armpits using his shirt. The housing complexes are anonymous, half-finished, and devoid of place and character (Figs. 44–45). Despite the extreme heat radiating from the bodies in the

⁴⁰ Vicari, p. 202.

film, the environment is cold and hard. As Vicari comments, there are numerous swimming pools shown in the film, but we never see them being used – the structures at no point provide relief.⁴¹ Elsewhere in the film, grey and brown angular spaces function as cells for the characters, the bars of their balconies gesturing towards a self-sanctioned imprisonment (an irony emphasised by the theme of surveillance and security running through the film). These images reinforce the sense of solitude, ‘the inability to leave a prison’ (Seidl) that defines all aspects of life, including leisure time (Figs. 46–47).

Vicari has argued that Seidl stands out from ‘the most pessimistic of current European directors’, a category that includes Michael Haneke, Catherine Breillat and Gaspar Noé:⁴²

[These directors] proceed from the belief that the breakdown of modern society has rendered individual lives all but definitively meaningless. [...] Seidl, on the other hand, has a streak of subverted romanticism. He seems us to want to care about his cracked-crystal characters’.⁴³

Indeed, there are small moments of tenderness and resolution that melt the glacial blocks between individuals. In the final part of the film, on the Sunday evening, the heavens open and the downpour provides a cathartic release from the oppressive heat. As Frau Theodorakis sits on a swing in front of the house, swinging back and forth in the rain, Herr Theodorakis comes outside and wordlessly joins her. Their togetherness, the mutual acknowledgement of each other’s existence, and the rain breaking the silence between them hints at reconciliation. Similarly, a scene in which Herr Walter and his housekeeper kneel over his beloved dog, Mendschi, which has been mysteriously poisoned, is intimate and touching in a way that supersedes the awkwardness of their encounters up to this point. It suggests that these two characters have found a way out of their solitude. Yet, these instances remain tinged by death:

⁴¹ Vicari, p. 200.

⁴² Ibid., p. 206.

⁴³ Ibid.

the death of the couple's daughter and of Herr Walter's dog Mendschi. Furthermore, the cyclical element to the film's structure – the weekend will come again, and again, and again – and to the patterns of behaviour and the inevitability of the landscape described above, make the overall outlook of the film very bleak indeed: the characters have no escape from the car parks and balconies that intern them.

In the following, I suggest that there are two further ways that make this reading of *Hundstage* through Benjamin pertinent: firstly, the relationship between alienation and aggression shown in the film, and secondly, the 'shocking' form that Seidl's depictions of violence take. From the very first scene of the film, the director portrays a society where violence is tightly woven into its fabric. Here we see Mario following a young man into the toilets of the club where his girlfriend, Claudia, is dancing on stage. After verbally attacking him for looking at her ('Meine Alte schau' nur ich an. Nur ich!'), we see Mario picking a fight with another man for watching the performance. Filmed using a hand-held camera, the jerky movement and shouting plunge the viewer head-first into the aggressive and confrontational mode of existence that characterises interactions between Mario, Claudia, and Lucky. Mario's rampage continues as he erratically drives his car along the empty highway, the tyres screeching as he skids. Claudia begs him to stop. Inside the car, the different viewpoints position us, too, as captive passengers, as the camera films from Claudia's perspective or from the back seat. Mario eventually stops and they begin to kiss, the cars and lorries passing in the background providing a fitting backdrop to their broken romance. Mario then begins to shout at Claudia to get out of the car, gripping her tightly and again, she pleads with him to stop and cries out as he hurts her and shouts: 'Weißt du, was du bist? Eine miese Hure'. Once out of the car, Claudia stands alone, looking out on to the highway, her skimpy dress reflecting the light, the presence of her abusive boyfriend reminding us of her vulnerability. The screen goes black and the film's title appears, as if to warn viewers: this was just the beginning.

The violence in *Hundstage* has different faces and in each case, it is presented as routine. It shows itself in the angry young men (Mario, Lucky) and their hatred of women, and in the violating gaze of the short man who gets into the lift with the teacher (Fig. 48). Here, the mask of weariness on the teacher's face is simultaneously one of resignation. Indeed, violence – and violent sex – is more than routine: it is the pervasive mode of interaction for alienated characters. Frau Theodorakis hits her husband when he does not respond; Hruby resolves the problem of the anonymous damage to cars by locking up the scapegoat and allowing her to be raped. It is explicit in these systems of discipline and punishment, and implicit in Herr Walter's passive aggression towards his neighbours and his insistence on 'Ordnung', for example.

One of the most violent scenes of the film takes place in the teacher's apartment when her lover, Wickerl, and his friend Lucky are visiting. It is the second part of an earlier scene in which we see Wickerl and Lucky arrive. They taunt and humiliate her, and play drinking games. This second instalment of terror opens with the teacher and Wickerl in the foreground, the teacher gripping her head with an expression of pain on her face and a drink in her hand, and Lucky in the background being sick on the floor. Wickerl stands above the teacher, points his finger at her and orders her to drink ("Trink aus!"). As the scene unfolds, we see the two men forcing the teacher to join them in their party-making using aggressive language and force. The violence is highly gendered: Wickerl calls the teacher (who is denied a name) 'du Sau'/'du Dreckssau' and the gestures and language from both men, as well as the teacher's skimpy dress, imply a threat of sexual violence. The cigarettes and Wickerl's heavy-duty jewellery hint at other potential domestic weapons of abuse. Although we learn nothing about Wickerl's past, Lucky at a later point apologises to the teacher for his own behaviour and claims that he has had traumatic experiences with women in the past. The film's recurrent theme of masculine vulnerability and its violent manifestations is illustrated by the two men's response to the teacher singing a line from *Carmen*, 'Ja, die Liebe hat bunte Flügel' rather

than the ‘Cucaracha’ demanded of her. Whilst her powerful song serves as a liberating mode of expression for an otherwise voiceless character, Wickerl and Lucky interpret her siren-like cries as threatening. As she continues, Lucky pours a bottle of wine on her head. She stands up, spits it out onto Wickerl’s face, who then drags her into the toilet and flushes her head in the bowl. The lighting is naturalistic and there are no special effects, the hand-held camera and medium shot keep the viewer on a painfully tight lead and are characteristic of Seidl’s documentary technique. The gaze of the camera resembles that of a third (male) character in the scene: like Lucky, we look across to Wickerl and down to the teacher (Fig. 49). It moves from one character to the next in a way that mimics eye movement, following the action and the characters as they speak. We are not given the point-of-view shots that would absolve us of our voyeurism: to look up at Wickerl from the teacher’s perspective would put us in the place of the victim, and to look down at her would reassure us of the fictional nature of the scene by re-establishing cinematic convention. Though mute and impotent, our position as spectators is comparable to that of Lucky’s. We are onlookers, we do not intervene and Wickerl’s abuse of the teacher is a performance that is staged for our enjoyment. This touches on a key element of the depiction of violence in the film: an exploration of the ethics of the viewing position by making the relationship between mediatised violence, pleasure, and complicity visible. Another clear instance is Anna’s rape. By denying us images of her punishment, the film makes us confront our own reactions to this denial: are we pleased to be spared the visual gratification of witnessing her ‘punishment’? Do we, too, on some level, feel that she deserved it?

At this juncture, I would like to return to Benjamin’s idea of the filmic ‘Chockwirkung’ – a kind of sensory training that is intended to jolt viewers out of the state of numbness by mimicking the shocks that they experience on a day-to-day basis. I do not claim that it is the montage in *Hundstage* that may be aligned with Benjamin’s notion of shock. However, I suggest that the positioning of the viewer as complicit in the instances of brutal violence in the film

may reveal parallels between Seidl's position and that of Benjamin. In the epilogue of the *Kunstwerk* essay, Benjamin asserts that the distracted subject has reached such a degree of numbness that he is able to take pleasure in violence against others (by consenting to war). It is precisely this that Seidl seeks to deny us in *Hundstage* by rendering the spectacle of violence unpleasurable.

There is a further key way in which the film may be seen as seeking to sensitise – and thus politicise – viewers: the visceral connection that Seidl seeks to create between the viewing subject and the projected image by foregrounding the physical body. The extreme heat and torpor sets the stage for sweaty, fleshy bodies worshipping the sun; we see a number of shots of the characters preening, trimming their bodily hair, tugging on their skin (Figs. 50–51). In one scene, the teacher stands in her underwear, slowly tearing off pieces from a roast chicken. The sounds are vivid: of the bones cracking, of the fat on her lips, of her sucking on the skin, of her chewing the meat. The framing in a medium close-up allows us to observe this process with a degree of intimacy, to follow her slow, concentrated swallowing (Fig. 52). A piece of chicken falls on to her chest; she wipes it off with a piece of kitchen towel, the combination of greasy flesh on flesh alluding to a primal state of existence. Indeed, Seidl awards ageing, sagging, perspiring bodies a significant amount of screen time in *Hundstage*. The shot in which the housekeeper performs a striptease for Herr Walter lasts a full two minutes. We look over Herr Walter's shoulder; our position as co-recipient of the striptease is unmistakeable. The vivid corporeality in the film is intended to prompt a visceral response from viewers, whether it is one of desire or repulsion. This, I argue, is indicative of how the film functions on a wider level when read through Benjamin, and is perhaps why Seeßlen is right to single out the film for its contribution to the future of cinema. With a similar double-function that Benjamin attributes to the filmic shock, *Hundstage* may also be read as a 'symptom of' and 'school for' the kind of sensory alienation that Seidl seems to attribute to advanced capitalism. On one hand, it vividly

portrays the numbness of suburban existence and the forms of aggression that characterise communication in this state. On the other hand, it is not a film that is received in a state of distraction; rather, the implication of the viewer in the scenes of violence encourages a more sensitive mode of reception, for it represents an invitation to experiential richness rather than poverty. In this way, we might argue that, in Benjaminian terms, the film seeks to ‘innervate’ its viewers through an alternative ‘politics of sensitivity’.

LONGING TO MAKE SENSE: *SEHNSUCHT*

At first glance, the milieu in *Sehnsucht* would appear to offer an antidote to the dehumanizing environment that Seidl presents in *Hundstage*. In light of Benjamin’s claims regarding the overstimulation of the city-dweller, the 200-strong Brandenburg village of Zühlen is even further removed from the bright lights of Haussmann’s Paris than the Viennese suburbs. The inhabitants of Zühlen do not recite advertising jingles or watch television; they gather around a bonfire or gaze out at a lake – their lives are defined by human interaction and connection with nature. Yet the story is book-ended by suicide attempts, and we can still identify symptoms of an incapacity to – or a ‘longing’ to – experience on the part of the protagonists. Whereas Seidl visualizes the dehumanizing backdrop to the characters’ alienated lives in the narrative of *Hundstage* – and thereby hints at the causes for any violent, self-destructive outbreaks – Grisebach is less forthcoming with hints relating to causality.

Yet it is possible to identify a similar ‘politics of sensitivity’, as we might call it: both films seek to provide us with an *intensification* of the viewing experience that is not based on distraction but on heightened sensory perception. This makes the film a remarkable counterpoint to Seidl’s *Hundstage* when read through Benjamin: I argue that Grisebach, like Seidl, draws upon different understandings of shock – perhaps more befitting of the modern

subject – to ‘innervate’ her viewers. She employs strategies that may be considered as a kind of formal training, an attempt to draw spectators into a kind of longing (to experience) via the moving image. *Sehnsucht* is interested in the process of ‘making sens(ible)’: it follows characters looking to make sense of their lives in the wake of a senseless act, and their experiencing a number of small ‘shocks’ along the way. Simultaneously, it complicates the sense-making capacity of film by rendering the narrative logic barely perceptible to the sense-making organs of the spectator. For Grisebach is not only demanding of her viewers the *intellectual* engagement required to piece together the narrative in order to ‘make sense’ of it – Benjamin’s ‘gesteigerte Geistesgegenwart’⁴⁴ – but in addition, her choice of framing, montage and sound invites viewers to engage with the film on a non-cognitive, affective level. I argue that Grisebach’s demands on the viewer in these different ways make *Sehnsucht* a more radical example of the political film in Benjamin’s terms than *Hundstage* is.

Valeska Grisebach was born in Bremen and studied film in Munich before attending the *Filmakademie Wien*, where Michael Haneke was teaching at the time. Her German-Austrian ‘dual heritage’, as Catherine Wheatley calls it,⁴⁵ has led her to be considered alongside both the generation of female Austrian directors who co-formed the coop 99 production company (Jessica Hausner and Barbara Albert), and the Berlin School of filmmaking.⁴⁶ Robert Weixelbaumer has commented that these two influences are clear in Grisebach’s work through the ‘clear consciousness of form’ characteristic of Petzold and others, and the cultural-sociological examination of the Austrian (and French) petit-bourgeois habitus on which

⁴⁴ Benjamin, ‘Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit’, p. 505

⁴⁵ Catherine Wheatley, ‘The “Feminine Aesthetic” of Valeska Grisebach and Jessica Hausner’, in Dassanowsky and Speck, eds, pp. 136–150 (p. 137).

⁴⁶ Essays and contributions on Grisebach appear in e.g. Marco Abel, *The Counter-Cinema of the Berlin School* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2013), *The Berlin School: Films from the Berliner Schule*, ed. by Rajendra Roy and Anke Leweke (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2013), and *Berlin School Glossary: An ABC of the New Wave in German Cinema*, ed. by Roger F. Cook, Lutz Koepnick, Kristin Kopp and Brad Prager (Bristol, UK: intellect, 2013).

Haneke and Seidl train their magnifying glasses.⁴⁷ Grisebach has directed only two films to date: an hour-long feature film that draws heavily on documentary aesthetic, *Mein Stern* (2001), and *Sehnsucht* (2006), which was entered in the ‘competition’ section of the *Berlinale* that year and received widespread critical acclaim. I agree with Weixelbaumer’s comments on Grisebach’s German-Austrian connections, although I would suggest that it is not an interest in the petit bourgeois milieu that merits her consideration alongside Haneke and Seidl, given that both of her films focus on working-class characters. Rather, it is the shock-laden way that she engages with violence, a point to which I return below.

There are some similarities between Valeska Grisebach and fellow Berlin School director Elke Hauck, both in their influences and mutual connections (Maurice Pialat; coop 99⁴⁸), and in the way that the two directors approached *Sehnsucht* and *Karger* respectively. Both directors received DEFA funding for their research, and set their films in local communities in eastern Germany. They both employed a cast of non-professional actors, the majority of whom were real inhabitants of the filmic setting, and both stories take place in a working-class milieu. However, the men in *Sehnsucht* are not plagued by unemployment as those in *Karger* are. Unlike the figure of Karger, Markus (Andreas Müller) seems settled in his job and his relationship: he lives together with his wife, Ella (Ilka Welz), in the small village of Zühlen. He is a locksmith and member of the voluntary fire brigade, she is a nursery school teacher and singer in the local choir; they are both firmly embedded in the local community. In spite of the ‘Postkartenglück’, as one critic describes the couple’s life together,⁴⁹ there are ‘shocking’ events that happen over the course of the film that destabilise their idyll. The first is a double suicide attempt – a man and a woman drive their car into a tree in the village, and Markus is the first

⁴⁷ Robert Weixelbaumer, “‘Ich würde alles für dich tun’: Valeska Grisebachs grosser Liebesfilm *Sehnsucht*”, *Kolik film*, 6 (2006), 15–20 (p. 17).

⁴⁸ James Bell, ‘When the World Splits Open’, *Sight and Sound*, 17 (2007), 45, and Wheatley, ‘The “Feminine Aesthetic” of Valeska Grisebach and Jessica Hausner’, p. 136.

⁴⁹ Josef Schnelle, ‘Melodrama im Brandenburgischen: *Sehnsucht* von Valeska Grisebach’, *Filmbulletin*, 48 (2006), 39–40 (p. 39).

on the scene. This experience of violence causes shockwaves in Markus's life, though we are left to speculate as to their reach, since a simple cause-and-effect logic is missing from the narrative. The story is told in chronological fragments that move the story forwards whilst denying spectators the illusion of any 'complete' understanding of the events that unfold. The extent to which Markus's encounter with death at the start of the film has a bearing on his life-changing decisions later on in the film is left for the viewer to discern.

The fragmentation in the narrative is underscored by framing in the film, already evident in the opening scene of the film. By means of a close-up shot with a hand-held camera, we follow the head and shoulders of Markus as he struggles to move something across a lawn, asking 'Hören Sie mich?'⁵⁰ Twenty seconds pass before the camera shows Markus at a little more distance and shows him arranging a male body into the recovery position. We hear no sound other than Markus' breathing and the siren of a fire engine approaching, then the film cuts to two long shots of the village: three children cycling up a road and out of the frame, followed by a grassy area showing people in the distance moving hurriedly towards what we can assume is the scene of an accident. The camera lingers on both of these images for several seconds before the film cuts to three successive shots of a large tree trunk into which a car has crashed. This opening sequence sets the tone for the film's approach to storytelling throughout: the fragmentary framing of parts of the car around the tree – the edge of a car door, the front of a crunched-up bonnet (Fig. 53) – and the snippets of dialogue between the firemen, as well as the few sentences that Markus speaks to the policeman, demand that spectators assemble the pieces for themselves – and emerge with less than a whole. All that we are told about the couple is that their seatbelts were not fastened; we are given no close-ups of the bodies, merely a static medium-long-shot of the firemen covering what we can assume is the woman's dead body with a blanket, and the ambulances pulling away at dusk. The attempted suicide itself is

⁵⁰ All quotations from the film refer to *Sehnsucht*, dir. by Valeska Grisebach (Piffil Medien, 2006).

not shown, but short, sombre images of its immediate aftermath are.

Thus the first act of ‘making sense’ we can identify in *Sehnsucht* is the kind that is required of the spectator, through his or her filling in the visual ellipses (where the consequences of an act are not pictured) and narrative ellipses (where information integral to the plot is not given). This process of ‘filling in’ forecloses a distracted state of viewing in two principal ways: firstly, it demands a more intellectually-engaged mode of spectatorship, similar to Haneke’s films in Chapter Four, and secondly, the ellipses in *Sehnsucht* are frequently related to a ‘shock’ of some sort on the narrative level, and thus stimulate an alertness in viewers. Grisebach masterfully combines these narrative shocks and ellipses, often, but not always, through the juxtaposition of gentle pacing with a short, sharp shock.

The first ten minutes of the film establish Ella and Markus as a happy couple. On the evening after the crash, she stands by his side in a small clearing at the edge of a lake. She puts her arm around him, and he draws her close – they are looking forwards together, seemingly contemplating a future that will be different from that of the couple in the car. When framed together, at home or with Ella’s family, the pair exchange words and glances that convey tenderness and trust; the close relationship they have with Ella’s nephew hints at their wish for a family of their own. When Markus leaves for a training course with the voluntary fire brigade, he tells Ella: ‘Am liebsten würde ich dich mit einpacken’; she tells him to be in touch and slips an origami swan into his bag for him to discover later.

The first major ellipsis occurs here. The film cuts from fire brigade members eating, drinking and dancing at a local *Vereinshaus*, to Markus waking up in the bed of one of the waitresses from the night before. This comes as a shock, firstly because of Markus’s apparent devotion to his wife, and secondly due to the lack of visual connections between Markus and Rose. We had not witnessed any looks exchanged, or indeed any suggestion of mutual acknowledgement. Our only clue as to his state of mind the night before is perhaps the most

memorable shot of the film: Markus's hypnotic, intoxicated dance to Robbie Williams' song, *Feel*. The camera focuses first on the waitress, Rose, from afar, before cutting to a medium shot of the back of Markus' head and shoulders as he moves around the dance floor slowly with outstretched arms and closed eyes. The unconventionally long take hints at the significance of the scene and, unlike in *Hundstage*, the reference to pop culture is a positive one, a channel through which experience is intensified. The lyrics – 'Not sure I understand this road I've been given/I sit and talk to God, and he just laughs at my plans/My head speaks a language I don't understand' – offer viewers an unconventional means of characterisation as we are invited to speculate whether Markus's longing to 'feel real love' is motivating his actions. It is only by looking back that this tentative link may be made, however; Markus's act of infidelity comes as a shock that forces viewers to 're-set' their perceptive apparatus, to cast their minds back, and to pay closer attention to a character who seemed so settled.

Markus and Rose spend the following night together, too, and the day after with Rose's family in their garden to celebrate a birthday. The integration of this social occasion into their three-day affair strips it of the mantle of illicitness and elevates it to something that resembles the beginnings of a relationship. Yet it seems that the struggle of reconciling his affair with his marriage prompts Markus to end his relationship with Rose, and, as they embrace in his hotel, Rose slips and falls over the edge of the balcony. This, too, is a significant visual ellipsis – and shock – in the film. Our view is obscured by the darkness and Markus's shadow as they hold each other on the balcony, and we can see neither of their faces. When she falls, we hear her cry out but are offered no image of the incident. Instead, we are given 12 seconds of darkness – the view from the balcony – accompanied by the sound of Markus's footsteps as he runs down the stairs, followed by an image of him leaning over her crumpled figure on the ground in front of the hotel in the darkness. No close-ups reveal the seriousness of her injuries and again, we are left wondering how this could have happened. Just like at the beginning of the film,

Markus kneels next to Rose as an ambulance approaches, reassuring her that she will be okay. She is taken to hospital, and the next day Markus is told by the police that Rose will be fine, but that she does not want to see him.

The elliptical narrative structure is carried through to the final scenes of the film. Back in Zühlen, Markus reveals to Ella what has happened, though we are only privy to the tail end of the conversation: he begs her not to leave him and tells her that he never meant to hurt her. His apology sounds hollow. ‘Ich hätte nie gedacht, dass ich solche Gefühle für dich empfinden würde’, she replies. The film then culminates in the second suicide attempt of the film. We see Markus loading the gun, and its impact on his body in fragments, showing how he is no longer ‘whole’ (Fig. 54). The bullet exit wounds on the back of his sweatshirt flash on the screen for one quarter of a second. There are no images of his face, nor of his body on the floor. Like the suicide that opens the film, his body is transported away by the emergency services with no further information offered to the viewer.

Markus himself may be the most elusive piece of the puzzle for viewers trying to make sense of *Sehnsucht*’s narrative. A protagonist whose actions and decisions are not made visible to viewers is particularly disruptive when combined with an elliptical narrative structure. Our inability to ‘make sense’ of *Sehnsucht* is due in large part to the way that Markus’s infidelity is difficult to comprehend within the context of the narrative. Whilst Wheatley claims to observe two different Markuses – one of whom drinks beer with Ella around the village bonfire, and the other who wears a knitted jumper and sips sparkling wine with Rose’s family⁵¹ – this distinction seems to me to be arbitrary. His life in one town could easily be switched for the other, and, as Wheatley comments, there is no whore/wife archetypal division between Rose and Ella: Markus seems drawn to both.⁵² He is an enigmatic character, an impression that

⁵¹ Catherine Wheatley, ‘Fire Eats the Soul’, *Sight and Sound*, 17 (2007), 44–45 (p. 44).

⁵² This is a point that Catherine Wheatley makes in ‘Fire Eats the Soul’, p. 44, and more extensively in ‘The “Feminine Aesthetic” of Valeska Grisebach and Jessica Hausner’, pp. 138–139.

Grisebach creates using various narrative and formal devices: the men in the fire brigade are convivial, communicative and caring, they ask him how he is coping with the aftermath of discovering the suicidal couple, and invite him to join them in various activities. Yet Markus maintains a distance, giving monosyllabic answers and refusing his friends' invitations. His work sets him apart from others, too; he is often pictured in solitude, alone in his workshop or fixing locks outdoors.

Both Ella and Rose clearly articulate their feelings to Markus using laconic, affective language: 'Ich begehre dich so', says Ella, and 'wenn ich dich so ansehe, bleibt mir echt die Luft weg'. 'Ich habe so eine Sehnsucht nach dir', says Rose. In emotional or intimate moments, we cannot rely on Markus's eloquence to deduce his thoughts, nor on his facial expressions (at one point, Ella says to him: 'Ich stelle mir Dinge vor, die wir sonst nicht tun. Dass wir mit einander reden wenn wir Sex haben'). The morning after he spends the night with Rose, the two exchange barely more than some ambiguous glances before Markus leaves. His expression is neutral, perhaps slightly amused, leaving all of our questions unanswered. Recurrent images of the protagonist alone frame him in a medium shot, against a wall, facing towards the camera, without a hint or flicker that would allow us to draw conclusions about his psychological state, or from behind, also in a medium shot, a more overt denial of insight into the character (Figs. 55–56). In these shots of Markus on his own, the lighting is not warm and low, as it is when he is filmed with Ella's family, for example; the tones are blue and the light is harsh – the cold reality of a solitary existence. What is the effect of this kind of glacial protagonist? Might we consider him an alienated character comparable to those in *Hundstage*, given that he, too, appears to use violence – against himself – as a means of escape? There are some clues in the plot of *Sehnsucht* that hint at possible answers.

After Markus has left the scene of the attempted suicide at the start of the film, he remains silent, as his colleagues from the voluntary fire brigade discuss the horror of

purposefully driving a car into a tree. At home later that evening, he struggles to give meaning to his experience. Whilst Ella perceives the couple's wish to die together as a Romeo and Juliet-esque act of love, Markus worries that his arrival at the scene and fast, life-saving response was too great an intervention: 'Irgendwie muss ich daran denken, dass ich seinen ganzen Plan durcheinander gebracht habe. Dass ich Schicksal gespielt habe'. This exchange between the pair introduces the second kind of 'sense-making' in the present analysis: the intra-diegetic theme of creating narratives as a means of 'making sense' in the film. The (in)ability to understand and make sense of situations, and the role that narrative plays in this, is a key thematic strand that runs through the film. Grisebach has said of *Sehnsucht*: 'Ich wollte ein Bild finden, zu zeigen dass jeder der Hauptdarsteller seines Lebens ist', and this conversation also sets the stage for Markus's exploration of agency and experience, his questioning of what it means to be alive, what it means to be the main protagonist in the film of your life.

Storytelling functions on different levels in the film. Unlike in *Hundstage*, the characters' bonding in *Sehnsucht* is realised through shared stories and shared histories rather than the mutual recognition of advertising jingles. In an early scene, for example, we see Ella, Markus, Ella's sister and brother-in-law, her nephew, and her grandmother eating dinner together. 'Ella, erzähl' mal deine Geschichte von deinen drei Tieren, die du damals ein bisschen weh getan hast', Markus says, prompting the family to recount the tale to Ella's nephew together. Low, naturalistic lighting and the framing of characters in twos or threes in medium close-ups create a congenial and intimate atmosphere. The storytelling includes the different family members, creating a space for competing narratives and their harmonious resolution. That the story is directed at Ella's nephew reinforces the story's function of strengthening the family bond through the passing of stories from one generation to the next. We then see Markus, Ella and her nephew sitting at a keyboard, singing a simple children's song. Ella dominates the

frame, positioned between her partner and her nephew, or in the foreground, with Markus in the background. She plays the keyboard as they sing together, and Markus jokingly adds an off-key harmony on top. Cuts to Ella's grandmother and her sister and brother-in-law visually integrate them into the group, constructing a dynamic portrait of the close-knit family.

Ella's interactions with her choir further illustrate the way that Grisebach creates a link between storytelling and belonging. They share stories over coffee, cake and schnapps: one woman talks about the sparks that flew between her and her boyfriend whenever they would see each other ('Da standen noch Leute da drum und Leute haben gesagt, dat war zu sehen'), and another explains how every time she went into hospital to give birth, her husband would welcome her back with a surprise home improvement of some sort. Tales of romantic gestures and sparks flying take Grisebach's thematic concern of exploring what it means to be the protagonist of one's own life beyond the character of Markus. Speaking about the interviews that she conducted when researching for the film, the director said: 'when you lead a very ordinary life, love is the arena where you suddenly want to be a melodramatic person'.⁵³ The cliché of there being a single, electrifying moment that ignites the start of a relationship is an example of how the characters also tap into melodramatic narratives in order to understand their experiences. This is not the sole domain of the women or the domestic, either. The men in the voluntary fire brigade share stories, too, asking 'Erinnert ihr euch daran, als...'; here, too, recalling mutual experiences serves to strengthen existing bonds.

Another function of the formulation of experience into narrative in *Sehnsucht* – or sharing stories – is to make sense of complex choices and actions. This includes Markus's statement to the police at the beginning of the film, for example, where he pieces together what happened in chronological order, as well as Ella's re-casting the actions of the suicidal couple in the terms of a Shakespearean tragedy. Like the description of sparks flying above,

⁵³ Bell, p. 45.

Ella, too, draws upon an established narrative in order to understand the couple's decision. Most significant, however, is that through its investigation of the role of storytelling and narrative in shaping and understanding experience, *Sehnsucht* gives viewers some important clues as to how to interpret its own elliptical structure: the self-reflexive coda at the end relegates the story of Markus, Ella and Rose to the annals of village history and thus the film itself becomes a narrative to be tapped into, debated, and interpreted. Here, we see a series of shots of the village with no people in them – a tree blowing in the wind, the edge of a football pitch, and the side of a house. They suggest that life can now return to how it was before the events took place, which is a sentiment that is reinforced by the final scene of the film: sitting atop a climbing frame, a group of teenagers discuss Markus and his dilemma as if it were folklore from the not-too-distant past. Some of the information is false (Markus had not gone away to put out a fire, Rose was not in the fire brigade), indicating that the story has passed through a number of channels before reaching this audience. An adult voice from behind the camera prompts the youngsters, asking questions about love, suicide, and how they would react in Markus's situation; the fourth wall is broken and the film genre switches from fiction to documentary. The young people look just above or to the side of the camera, characteristic of talking heads in documentaries (Fig. 57), and one girl reveals that Markus survived and is now living with one of the two women, not saying which. *Cahiers du Cinéma* critic Axel Zeppenfeld comments that this scene has a choral element to it,⁵⁴ and indeed the conversation functions as both commentary and interpretation, helping viewers to understand what happened by revealing and commenting on the outcome of the tragic tale. In this way, the scene may certainly be read in the tradition of a Greek chorus. The children are removed from, yet part of, the dramatic action. Furthermore, the discussion of Markus and his dilemma in abstract, mythical terms echoes the discussion between Markus and Ella at the start of the film about

⁵⁴ Axel Zeppenfeld, 'Légende vivante: Désir(s) de Valeska Grisebach', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 627 (2007), 28–29 (p. 29).

Romeo and Juliet: the camp is split between finding the protagonists' actions 'romantisch', 'mutig' and 'ganz dumm'. With this structural twist, *Sehnsucht* represents a sophisticated exploration of sense-making through narrative on both an intra- and extra-diegetic level. It encourages reflection on the part of the viewer on the construction of narrative and the complex, often imperceptible forces that impact on individuals' decision-making. Unlike a fable or myth, however, *Sehnsucht* offers viewers no resolution or moral to take from the story; our attempts at sense-making can only fail.

Consideration of *Sehnsucht* in the tradition of a fable or folklore is useful when examining the form of the film, too. Grisebach has said:

Für mich hatte sie etwas von einem Country-Song, etwas ganz Schlichtes. Ich war auf der Suche nach einer Form von Reduktion. Das Dorf hat mit dem realen Dorf wenig zu tun. Es ist mehr die Vorstellung von dem, was man damit verbindet, was zu einer gewissen Form von Schlichtheit beitragen kann, oder auch von Dingen, die man mit einer altmodischeren und märchenhafteren Sache assoziiert – wie das Dorf, das Haus, die Straße, die Frau, der Mann.⁵⁵

Grisebach has spoken about her admiration of contemporary American literature for its laconic language,⁵⁶ and we might also identify a kind of laconism of the image in *Sehnsucht*. Whilst the documentary aesthetic in *Hundstage* is juxtaposed with hyperrealist colours and symmetrical framing, *Sehnsucht* combines naturalistic lighting and a hand-held camera with images that gesture towards more conventional films, or what Marco Abel refers to as

⁵⁵ Margret Köhler, 'Mehrere Leben: Ein Gespräch mit Valeska Grisebach', *film-dienst*, 59 (2006), 56–57 (p. 57).

⁵⁶ In an interview with the *taz*, Grisebach said, 'Ich lese sehr gerne zeitgenössische amerikanische Literatur. Die Sprache ist so lakonisch, verkürzt, so umgangssprachlich. Das ist eine interessante Fährte für [Kameramann] Bernhard Keller [...]'. See Cristina Nord, 'Man stürzt, steht wieder auf und latscht weiter', *taz*, 18 February 2006, <<http://www.taz.de/1/archiv/archiv/?dig=2006/02/18/a0189>> [accessed July 2013].

‘representational realism’.⁵⁷ This brings us to the third kind of sense-making in the film, which illuminates most clearly the link between *Sehnsucht* and Benjamin’s writing on shock and experience. Like Seidl in *Hundstage*, Grisebach employs formal devices – sound, framing and montage in particular – which seek to produce sensitivity rather than numbness in the viewer. It is a sensitivity that goes beyond the cognitive capacity to make sense of an elliptical narrative; a form that at times seeks to provoke a physical response from viewers.

Marco Abel writes about Grisebach in similar terms, noting the juxtaposition between a documentary-style realism and what he calls ‘melodramatic tableaux vivants’.⁵⁸ For example, he cites the cut at the start of the film between the shot in the fire station, where the group of men from the fire brigade are filmed in a way that gives the impression of documentary, and the more cinematic image of Markus and Ella by the lakeside. He conceives of the interaction between these two modes as ‘radical affective shifts’ and argues that:

Longing posits these cinematic registers as two equally artificial inflections of, and attitudes towards, reality, rather than presenting either as the means by which the film allows us to take comfort in the belief that what we see is really what we get. [...] It is precisely the subtle back and forth that affects our perception of what we see and hear on screen as well as how we might think about our perceptions of the real in general.⁵⁹

This is how, for Abel, the film renders viewers more sensitive. Yet I would argue that there are other remarkable ways that the film ‘triggers in us a perceptive readjustment’ (in Abel’s terms),⁶⁰ or acts as an instrument for training the ‘*tiefgreifenden Veränderungen der Apperzeption*’ in

⁵⁷ Marco Abel, “‘A Sharpening of our Regard’: Realism, Affect and the Redistribution of the Sensible in Valeska Grisebach’s *Longing* (2006)”, in *New Directions in German Cinema*, ed. by Paul Cooke and Chris Homewood (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), pp. 204–222 (p. 207 and passim).

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 213.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 213–214.

⁶⁰ Abel, ‘Seeing and Saying’, in *Berlin School Glossary. An ABC of the New Wave in German Cinema*, ed. by Roger F. Cook, Lutz Koepnick, Kristin Kopp and Brad Prager (Bristol, UK: intellect, 2013), pp. 231–237 (p. 236).

Benjamin's terms.⁶¹ For example, Grisebach draws attention to a more finely attuned mode of perception in *Sehnsucht* via the character of Markus. Although his decision-making processes are invisible, and he ultimately remains enigmatic, that which we are able to glean about his character, we glean from his body.

When Markus is visiting Rose's family, he unexpectedly bumps into the fence when following Rose into the house; we might then read this momentary physical deviation as evidence of an alcohol-induced longing for escape. The scenes of intimacy in *Sehnsucht* are especially compelling in this respect, too. The absence of extra-diegetic music allows us to hear every movement, every grasp of a shirt collar, every deep breath, and every small sound the characters make. The first time we see the married couple in bed together comes after Markus has returned from his training weekend. Their dynamic resembles a game of push-and-pull: Ella says to Markus, 'Schlaf mit mir', pulling him towards her as he gently pushes her away, restraining her with his hands. He remains mute and consents silently, whilst his body sustains this tug-of-war with his wife. How are we to make sense of this scene? Is Markus projecting an inner struggle on to Ella? Is his guilt driving his resistance? The camera invites us to look closer, cutting quickly from a medium shot to a medium close-up, to a close-up. The signs that Grisebach asks viewers to read are as subtle as Markus shifting his weight from one side to the other or a small gasp from Ella. In these scenes, then, it is not so much a physical response that is demanded on the part of the viewer, than a more attentive, sensitive mode of looking and listening.

Another key scene in this regard is Markus's impassioned dancing to 'Feel'. With his head thrown back, and arms outstretched, his performance is incredibly sensuous; for the viewer, the sound is relatively 'pure', that is, it is not tempered with the ambient noise of chatter from moments before, when the camera was focused on Rose and the song begins. The

⁶¹ Benjamin, 'Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit', p. 505.

positioning of the camera at eye level and its slight movement from side to side, following Markus as he dances, does not give the impression of voyeurism, but rather of a shared filmic space between viewer and protagonist alone, a feeling that is intensified by the length of the scene (a full two minutes). Thus, whilst retrospectively the scene may hint at Markus's infidelity to come, it has a different, non-functional role in the moment in which it is experienced by the viewer. It prompts a reaction to the sound, movement, and strong emotion visible on Markus's face that is separate from the 'sense-making' required to piece together the storyline. The power of the scene, I argue, lies precisely in its asking viewers to encounter its images in a non-cerebral manner; we derive gratification not from the satisfaction of understanding what it tells us about Markus, but rather from our sensuous connection with the protagonist through the richness of the images and sounds we perceive.

The culmination of the film – the four-minute scene in which Markus attempts suicide – offers a final example of how Grisebach employs formal devices that seek to rouse a state of alert sensitivity in the viewer. Here, we see Markus in his workshop, building a cage for his nephew's rabbit. The bright space is accompanied by the diegetic soundtrack of Markus drilling, of passing cars, and of birds' twittering. The shots are long: the ASL for this scene is 19.5 seconds, indicative of the 'radical observation' to which Grisebach subjects her characters.⁶² Abel calls her approach 'phlegmatic', and indeed the camera maintains a dispassionate distance from Markus.⁶³ We observe him working, then kneeling next to the finished cage and playing with the rabbit. He holds the rabbit to his chest, gazing down at the top of its head and stroking its grey fur. In the next shot, he takes bullets from the counter and slowly loads them into a shotgun. No music or rapid editing hurries the scene towards its climax; the next shot of Markus looking down the barrel of his shotgun lasts a full 50 seconds. As with the rest of the film, this medium shot is filmed using a hand-held camera; though the

⁶² Abel, "'A sharpening of our regard'", p. 208.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

camera is static, its small degree of movement – its ‘breath’ – is mirrored in Markus’ chest moving up and down as he holds the barrel of the gun to his heart. His torso occupies around a quarter of the frame, and we are given an extraordinarily long time to study his inhaling and exhaling and wonder what or who will be the recipient of the bullets. He reaches down towards the trigger, which is positioned off-frame. However, the sound of shuffling to his right prompts him to take the gun with both hands and prop it up against the side of his workbench. The film then cuts to a shot of the rabbit with Markus’ hand feeding and stroking it, intercut with a medium close-up of the side of Markus’ face as he gazes down distractedly at the animal. His slow, contemplative movements throughout the scene contrast with the drone of passing cars outside, distancing Markus from the prosaic rhythms of everyday life. The ten-second static shot of the rabbit that follows is finally interrupted by the sound of a gunshot and the film cuts to a half-second image of Markus’s fragmented body – his back, then his legs (see Fig. 54) – as he is thrust backwards. He was standing facing the corner of his workshop; a wall with tools hanging from it and a wooden workbench storing different-sized toolboxes. After Markus has fallen to the floor, we remain standing just behind where he stood, for 18 seconds we are left gazing into the workshop that he no longer occupies, listening to a dog barking in the distance, given the time and space to contemplate this act of violence that the protagonist has inflicted upon himself. There is no reaction shot from another character to offer catharsis for, or escape from, our own emotion.

The long takes in this scene, the lack of extra-diegetic sound and the observational mode of filming contribute to the ‘laconism of the image’ (or ‘Form von Reduktion’ in Grisebach’s words⁶⁴) I mention above. When combined with this act of violence, the effect is shocking: the heightened sense of perception that Grisebach’s laconic form stimulates throughout the film is intensified in the three-and-a-half minutes before the shot is fired. The

⁶⁴ Köhler, ‘Mehrere Leben’, p. 57.

elliptical narrative – that is, the sense-making demanded of viewers – ensures that, up to this point, we have been searching for clues in the minutiae of the characters’ movements. As a result, we experience the shock of the gunshot with heightened intensity, just as we do Markus waking up at Rose’s apartment, or Rose’s fall from the balcony. This, I argue, corresponds to a kind of ‘rendering sensitive’ of the viewer. It represents a kind of sense-perceptive, Benjaminian ‘training’ on the part of Grisebach: a demand that we engage more *sensuously* with the images in *Sehnsucht* and thus, accordingly, with our realities outside of the cinema.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

There is little doubt that Benjamin’s description of the modern subject as necessarily protecting him or herself from excessive stimuli continues to be relevant in the age of advanced capitalism. It is a subject that *Hundstage* touches on indirectly through the character of the hitchhiker, Anna, and her incessant repetition of advertising jingles, but which is largely absent in *Sehnsucht*, where the pace of life and wardrobes of the protagonists may equally situate the story in a pre-digital age. The characters in *Hundstage* typify the kind of experiential poverty that Benjamin describes as dangerous, for it is accompanied by explosions of anger and violence, and widespread communication breakdown. In *Sehnsucht*, things appear to be different: free from the distraction of television and shopping malls, the community in Zühlen bonds over shared histories. This film does not make sense, then, as here, too, we see a character who appears to be alienated from himself, where only violence offers an answer to his aporia. The intellectual demands on the spectator are therefore somewhat greater in *Sehnsucht* than in *Hundstage*. Where Seidl visualizes the various bars that imprison his characters – the cyclical routines, the sounds and images of advanced capitalism, the cold, dehumanizing physical environments – Grisebach is less kind to her viewers. Neither the characters nor we

can make sense of the suicide attempts, and their positioning at the start and at the end of the film implies the perpetuation of the status quo; that such incidents will continue to happen over and again. We might then, conversely, identify a kind of optimism in Seidl's approach. Giving a name and a face to the sources of the characters' alienation is surely a necessary prerequisite for conceiving of an alternative. In this way, Grisebach's world is the bleaker of the two.

Yet through a kind of 'politics of sensitivity', both films exhibit a formal optimism. They both offer a viewing experience that is non-conventional – particularly with regards to the violent scenes – that stimulates a non-cognitive, sensuous mode of spectatorship. At this point, it is useful to recall Hansen's differentiation of Benjamin's 'protective shield' from Freud's. She notes that for Benjamin, the shield could be understood 'less as a carapace or armour, than as a matrix – a porous interface between the organism and the world that would allow for a greater mobility and circulation of psychic energies'.⁶⁵ This is, then, how the two films in this chapter are political in Benjamin's terms: Grisebach and Seidl seem to intend for the images and sounds in *Sehnsucht* and *Hundstage* respectively to permeate the 'porous interface' of viewers' perceptive apparatus. For Benjamin, as for Kluge, the numb, distracted viewer is synonymous with the apathetic citizen who is thus open to manipulation ('*Die Rezeption in der Zerstreuung[...] hat am Film ihr eigentliches Übungsinstrument*'⁶⁶); the shock function of film is to jolt viewers out of their state of apathy. The different ways that Grisebach and Seidl employ shocks differ from Benjamin's conception of a filmic shock that is based on the kinetics of cinema, i.e. that cutting from one image to the next exerts a kind of shock on the viewer. In an age in which rapid, MTV-style editing is the norm, the shocks in *Sehnsucht* and *Hundstage* stand out for their languorous pace. Here, they are generated through the discomfort of the viewing

⁶⁵ Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, p. 137.

⁶⁶ Benjamin, 'Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit', p. 505. Emphasis in original.

position, through the inability to make sense of the events on-screen, and through the short, sharp shocks of accidents and suicide attempts. Combined with the filmmakers' emphasis on the sensuous experience of cinema-going, these shocks produce a different kind of politics of sensitivity that is Benjaminian in character and befitting of the modern subject.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Which fragments from this quarry, which layers of this palimpsest can help us reconfigure the place of the cinema within contemporary (audio-)visual culture?¹

Miriam Hansen

This thesis offers some tentative answers to the above question posed by Hansen in reference to Kracauer's *Theory of Film*, and broadens its scope. It argues that theories of the cinema in relation to the experience of modernity and attributed to the neo-Marxist thinkers associated with the Frankfurt School have retained their currency in a post-modern age of advanced capitalism. It focuses in particular on what I call 'optimistic' theoretical strands in specific texts by Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer and Alexander Kluge that emphasise the leftist-political potential of film and the imperative to tap this. This study illustrates the relevance of this filmic optimism by reading a selection of German and Austrian films against different theoretical tropes put forward by the three thinkers. It sets up a form of dialogue between Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge and contemporary directors, and shows the ways in which post-Wende filmic practices may be seen as responding to theories articulated at historically and politically different points in the twentieth century. Furthermore, by reading

¹ Miriam Hansen, 'Introduction', in Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. vii–xlv (p. xxxv).

contemporary films through this distinctive framework, this thesis maps the leftist political contours of the political in German and Austrian film. The novelty of this approach lies in the theoretical and empirical constellation: though scholars have discussed Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge in the same breath, the thinkers' film-related texts have until now not been applied to these German-language films in the form of an integrated theoretical framework.

In the introduction to this thesis, I note scholars' warnings that classical Marxism lost its legitimacy as a paradigm following the fall of the Iron Curtain,² and acknowledge the perils of applying an arguably outmoded framework. True, there are other inequalities within neo-liberal societies beyond class oppression and disproportionate wealth distribution, such as those based on ethnicity, gender and sexuality, which cultural producers must address, and thus my analysis may seem incomplete. Yet, through my film analyses, I show how some specific, subject-based concerns articulated by Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge remain pertinent. The aim of this thesis is to show the points of continuation, and to maintain that the thinkers' underlying argument that art – film – has an obligation to produce a critical, enlightened viewer is universal and can, or rather, should be updated to consider contemporary cultural practices.

The points of continuation on the trajectory of filmic optimism I identify are varied in focus. I ask whether it is possible to speak of a twenty-first century German-language worker film and if so, who is the worker? The answer, as I show in Chapter Two, is multilayered. It is clear why an anti-capitalist orientation in the storyline and the self-representation of the figure of the worker would have been key concerns for Benjamin, Kracauer, and Kluge. They have different relationships to Marxist doctrine, yet each subscribes to the underlying call for subject matter that relates to the experiences of the everyman and everywoman, as well as more egalitarian production structures. Given the historical specificity of the directives laid out by

² Tim Bergfelder, Erica Carter and Deniz Göktürk, 'Introduction', in *The German Cinema Book*, ed. by Tim Bergfelder, Erica Carter and Deniz Göktürk (London: BFI, 2002), pp. 1–12 (p. 5).

Benjamin and Kracauer during the rise of fascism in Germany, Chapter Two is perhaps most liable to accusations of anachronism. In the characterisation of workers in *Workingman's Death* and *Karger*, I find little evidence of the kind of revolutionary impetus that is present in the Soviet films to which Benjamin and Kracauer refer. Though the directors appear to celebrate the worker figure, the workers they depict show resignation regarding their lack of agency. Yet this says a great deal about how Michael Glawogger and Elke Hauck regard the state of manual labour in post-reunification Germany. Both films exhibit a critique of the prevailing socio-economic system – which I define via Deleuze as capitalism of higher-order production – through the portrayal of forced economic migration and globalisation. There is no longer a place for the German male blue-collar worker in his home country, the directors argue. Unless he migrates elsewhere or learns the rules of higher-order production – corporations instead of factories, selling entrance tickets for the Duisburg entertainment park in the epilogue of *Workingman's Death*, rather than operating its machinery, for example – unemployment awaits him.

The socio-economic gap between the director and the workers on-screen – whether real, in Glawogger's case, or fictional, in Hauck's case – offer a gauge for the extent to which these twenty-first-century worker films correspond to the quite radical ideals laid out by Benjamin and Kluge concerning democratic modes of production. Benjamin and Kluge stress the collaborative nature of filmmaking, claiming that showing respect for the worker means facilitating his or her self-representation where possible. Though Glawogger or Hauck express the desire to pay respect to the workers they depict, neither goes as far to break down the division between director and subject. Nevertheless, applying my framework in this chapter prompts reflection on some key questions about labour, film and politics in twenty-first-century Germany. In my readings of *Workingman's Death* and *Karger*, I suggest that Hauck seeks to moderate the hierarchical relationship between artist and subject to a certain extent by

focusing on the community in which she grew up. She glances sidelong at the workers in her film, separate yet on the same level, as opposed to looking downwards, which is how I characterise Glawogger's gaze in his artistic documentary. I argue that Glawogger's awe-inspiring extreme long shots and vivid use of colour have the effect of fetishising the workers in a way that further reinforces the imbalance of power between artist and subject. By turning the workers' bodies and surroundings into objects of beauty, Glawogger falls short of the democratic ideals of the worker film as expressed by Benjamin and Kluge.

Workingman's Death and *Karger* are both films that have received comparatively little critical attention in German and Austrian film studies; both Glawogger and Hauck are lesser-known directors in the categories into which they tend to be placed – the anti-globalisation documentary and the *Berliner Schule* respectively. By reading them in the tradition of the worker film, I suggest that the films issue some powerful statements concerning the state of labour in western Europe and thus merit our attention.

Furthermore, my discussion of *Workingman's Death* and *Karger* introduces several theoretical tropes that recur throughout the thesis, and which illuminate some points of comparison and intersection between films that are not usually analysed alongside one another. I take up the subject of work again in Chapter Three, for example, in my discussion of *Halt auf freier Strecke*. Through Kluge's concept of *Gegenöffentlichkeit*, I suggest that *Karger* and *Halt auf freier Strecke* contest and strive to counter the invisibility of labour in mainstream film in similar ways. Further tropes introduced in Chapter Two that make clear other connections between the films I examine include a critique of capitalism and the ongoing relevance of Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge's concerns relating to the alienated state of the modern subject; the ethical implications of the relationship between form and content and the rejection of filmic forms that encourage a film's 'consumption'; and the representation of experiences that lie outwith dominant narratives.

Kracauer's *Theory of Film* is a text that is certainly not out of place amongst the above theoretical strands, despite Kracauer's apparent lack of Marxist orientation – which resulted in Adorno's accusation of 'naïve realism'.³ In my reading of *Marseille* in Chapter Three, I argue that Schanelec strives to maintain a link with the real, and, in so doing, she adheres to a set of principles that overlap substantially with Kracauer's prescriptions on cinematic realism. In their recent edited volume about Kracauer, Gerd Gemünden and Johannes von Moltke situate renewed interest in Kracauer within a wider trend that argues for the relevance of 'classical' film theory from the first half of the twentieth century in discussions of twenty-first century media, aligning Kracauer with André Bazin, Bela Balazs, and Rudolf Arnheim.⁴ Whilst Benjamin's more inclusive *Kunstwerk* essay has long been evoked to make sense of technological shifts and their effect on the cultural sphere, Gemünden and von Moltke argue that Kracauer and others are also proving their contemporaneity:

As film takes on an increasingly "virtual" life in the digital age, it stands to reason that we should want to return to those texts that most decisively located the specificity of what preceded the digital – namely, the indexical nature of the photographic.⁵

Further, they argue that, amidst debate concerning the 'purported demise' of those characteristics traditionally ascribed to the photographic 'at the hands of the digital',⁶ it is also worth re-visiting classical film theory's relationship with realism. My analysis of *Marseille* contributes to these debates by showing how Kracauer's approach remains pertinent. As

³ Theodor W. Adorno, 'Der wunderliche Realist: Über Siegfried Kracauer', in *Schriften* 11, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), pp. 388–408.

⁴ Gerd Gemünden and Johannes von Moltke, 'Introduction: Kracauer's Legacies', in *Culture in the Anteroom: The Legacies of Siegfried Kracauer*, ed. by Gerd Gemünden and Johannes von Moltke (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), pp. 1–25 (p. 13). Gemünden and von Moltke give a brief overview of this trend, suggesting that it was no coincidence that the 2008 Kracauer conference at Dartmouth College took place around the time of conferences on Bazin in Paris and Yale, as well as a conference on Arnheim at Harvard. See p. 25, footnote 31.

⁵ Gemünden and von Moltke (eds), p. 13.

⁶ Ibid.

Gemünden and von Moltke write about the contributors to their 2012 volume on Kracauer, I, too, challenge ‘the misguided assumption that theories of the photographic have nothing more to tell us in the digital age’.⁷ By aligning *Marseille* with *Theory of Film*, I demonstrate that, through her use of sound and image, and by employing devices to make certain parts of the film seem ‘stagy’ as a point of contrast, Schanelec’s project is one that seeks to ‘record and reveal’ reality. The accusation that Berliner Schule filmmakers use form as a ‘Schutzschild gegen das Leben’, in the words of Dominik Graf,⁸ is not infrequently directed at Schanelec. Unlike fellow *Berliner Schule* filmmakers Christian Petzold and Thomas Arslan, Schanelec borrows less from genre convention and makes films that frustrate through their apparently willful obscurity – and border on the avant-garde, as I show through Kracauer. Yet I show that *Marseille* has a more concrete, a more material interest in reality as a subject matter than charges of formalism levelled by critics like Graf would suggest.

The relationship between the camera and reality is where Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge differ the most. Klugerian forms of protest against the ‘text of reality’⁹ inform my readings of Andreas Dresen’s *Halt auf freier Strecke* and Gerhard Friedl’s *Hat Wolff von Amerongen Konkursdelikte begangen?* I differentiate here between a more moderate form of protest, based predominantly on subject matter in the former; and a distinct, radical realism that is both Benjaminian and Klugerian in character in the latter. Dresen expresses a commitment to recounting real experiences in an authentic way, relating to a subject that is visible in mainstream media only when packaged in standard narratives, he claims. His portrayal of death – with its sharp, uncomfortable, sometimes humorous edges – thus represents a challenge to dominant discourse, the reality-text, on the subject. He contributes to a

⁷ Gemünden and von Moltke (eds), p. 13.

⁸ Dominik Graf, ‘Unerlebte Filme’, *Schnitt*, 43 (2006), 62–65 (p. 64). See also Chapter One, p. 27, footnote 93.

⁹ Eike Friedrich Wenzel, ‘Construction Site Film: Kluge’s Idea of Realism and His Short Films’, in *Alexander Kluge: Raw Materials for the Imagination*, ed. by Tara Forrest (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), pp. 173–190 (p. 180).

Gegenöffentlichkeit in Negt and Kluge's terms: a public sphere in which viewers may recognise their own realities in the events depicted on-screen. This realism is one associated with truth rather than a one-to-one, indexical relationship between film and reality. The scope of scholarly works on Andreas Dresen is disproportionately small given the breadth and success of his oeuvre. A biography and a short monograph (published before *Halt auf freier Strecke* was released), both in German, are the main publications on the director alongside chapters in edited volumes.¹⁰ Dresen is generally celebrated for his combination of social issues and comedy, and for retaining a social focus during the transition of the German film industry following the demise of DEFA. By reading the director through Kluge and Negt in Chapter Three, this study also argues for the significance of Dresen as a director who is political in ways that may not seem apparent upon first viewing.

*Hat Wolff von Amerongen Konkursdelikte begangen?*² is the least-well known film to which this thesis turns its attention, and there are only a handful of reviews of the film as a result of festival screenings. There is no scholarship on Gerhard Friedl and following his untimely death in 2009, he runs the risk of fading into obscurity. Yet Friedl's radical approach in *Wolff von Amerongen* makes him a central figure in this thesis, and my work illustrates the breadth of forms that the political – as defined here by Benjamin and Kluge – may take. In my analysis of the film, I argue that the disjunctive juxtaposition of filmed documentary material and recorded sound with the history of German industry magnates has a number of different functions: on a diegetic level, it disrupts the standard narrative of a national industrial history by interweaving tales of the absurdity, corruption, bankruptcy and politically dubious dealings of known German figures into the chronological recounting of factual information. Like *Halt auf freier Strecke*, but with a different focus, this film, too, is a protest against the 'reality-text'. On an extra-diegetic level, the montage emphasises the historical dimension of the film in a different

¹⁰ Hans-Dieter Schütt, *Andreas Dresen: Glücks Spiel* (Berlin: be bra Verlag, 2013), and David Lode, *Abenteuer Wirklichkeit: die Filme von Andreas Dresen* (Marburg: Schüren Verlag, 2009).

way, by synthesising stories of the past with images of the present. In this way, Friedl may be read as responding to Kluge's directive – with reference to Brecht: 'Es muß möglich sein, die Realität als die geschichtliche Fiktion, die sie ist, auch darzustellen'.¹¹ Further, the film's disparate, fragmented form and periods of silence leave it open to interpretation, giving the viewer the time and space to create meaning for him- or herself.

As mentioned above, the challenge to the viewer that a fragmented form poses is a primary theoretical component of this thesis. For Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge, a film with a rounded narrative that gives the viewer the illusion of complete knowledge, and a form that leaves little to the imagination, is not fulfilling the potential of the medium. Directors must generate a critical audience comprised of active collaborators. This task is linked to the other main theoretical thread that binds the three theorists: a critique of the subject that is bound up with the experience of modernity. For Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge, the numbness that prevails amongst an inactive, under-stimulated audience reflects a condition of political inactivity. In the last two chapters of this thesis, I contend that these concerns are still present in the work of contemporary German-speaking directors. They, too, theorise – and seek to transform – viewers' capacity to (re)act and to experience through film, thus realising, to a certain extent, the theoretical imperatives expressed by Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge.

Formal and narrative fragmentation represents one way of producing critical spectators. I align Michael Haneke's manifesto concerning the duties of a filmmaker to refrain from giving 'schnelle Antworten'¹² with the autonomous mode of spectatorship advocated in texts by Kluge. Specifically, I look at the director's emphasis on 'Dialogfähigkeit'¹³ and show

¹¹ Alexander Kluge, 'Die schärfste Ideologie: daß die Realität sich auf ihren realistischen Charakter beruft', in Klaus Eder and Alexander Kluge, *Ulmer Dramaturgien: Reibungsverluste* (Munich: Hanser, 1980), pp. 119–125 (p. 119).

¹² Michael Haneke, 'Film als Katharsis' in *Austria (in)felix: zum österreichischem Film der 80er Jahre*, ed. by Francesco Bono (Graz: Blimp, 1992), p. 89.

¹³, Thomas Assheuer, *Nahaufnahme Michael Haneke: Gespräche mit Thomas Assheuer* (Berlin: Alexander, 2008) p. 51.

how he realises this by denying viewers a straightforward storyline in a digestible form in *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls* and in *Code Inconnu: Récit incomplet de divers voyages*. The psychological processes behind the actions of Haneke's characters are not made visible for viewers: we have to piece together the fragments and draw upon our own experiences, to look to our immediate surroundings, in order to construct meaning out of the disparate pieces. I analyse the various formal and narrative devices that seek to transform a spectator from a consumer to a collaborator, arguing that Haneke's intentions mirror those expressed by Kluge, in particular, in relation to his well-known essay, 'Der Zuschauer als Unternehmer'. In contrast to Friedl, Haneke's films are the focus of extensive scholarship, in which reading them in the tradition of Brecht as well as the Frankfurt School is relatively common practice.¹⁴ The comparison or alignment with Kluge is underdeveloped, however,¹⁵ which is surprising given the substantial crossovers in perspective – such as their shared interest in the enlightened viewer – that I demonstrated in Chapter Four. Given that Adorno's embracing of film was hesitant at best, it is reasonable to suggest that Kluge's optimism concerning its potential offers an equally stimulating framework through which to interpret Haneke's glacial world.

The thinkers' concerns about the alienated condition of the modern subject serve as a point of departure for the final chapter of this thesis. It examines the line between alienation and violence, a connection that Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge each draw at different points of the twentieth century – at a time when fascism was looming on horizon, as well as once the 'go-for-broke game of history', in Kracauer's terms, had been lost and mass genocide had been committed. The focus of this chapter is the *Schockwirkung*, a double-edged theoretical concept

¹⁴ See Chapter One, p. 31, footnote 105.

¹⁵ See Tara Forrest, 'A Negative Utopia: Michael Haneke's Fragmentary Cinema', in Terri Ginsberg, and Andrea Mensch, *A Companion to German Cinema* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2012), pp. 553–572; Monica Filimon, '19 May 2000: With *Code Inconnu* Haneke Asserts Cinema's Centrality to Public Sphere', in *A New History of German Cinema*, ed. by Jennifer M. Kapczynski and Michael D. Richardson (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2012), pp. 565–571 (p. 565). Forrest's relatively short analysis and Filimon's nominal mention indicate that there is certainly scope to extend the Klugerian lens in scholarship on Haneke.

that stresses the capacity of film to mimic or represent shock, as well as its ability to re-cast the protective shield that viewers have developed into a ‘porous interface’ (Hansen). The task of film, Benjamin maintains, is to make viewers more receptive to experiencing the world in a less alienated – and therefore more politically aware – state. In Chapter Four, the politically aware spectator is one who consciously strains the muscles of his or her perception, in Kluge’s terms, in order to make sense of Haneke’s glacial characters and environments. In Chapter Five, the politically aware spectator is defined not by intellectual engagement, but by his or her visceral reaction to the moving image. I articulate this distinction through the idea of a ‘politics of sensitivity’.

Ulrich Seidl makes the link between alienation and violence abundantly clear in the narrative of *Hundstage*, where we are presented with a cast of characters beset by loneliness and who are unable to break out of cycles of aggression and anger. Half-finished concrete housing estates provide the backdrop for Seidl’s dehumanised humans and visually reinforce the sense of hopelessness. In the small, rural community in which Grisebach’s protagonists in *Sehnsucht* live, however, the outbreaks of violence in the form of suicides are more puzzling. The chronological fragments progress the story whilst denying viewers the illusion of any complete understanding of the events that unfold. Yet through Benjamin, it is possible to link the two films and locate a common politics of sensitivity. In my analyses, I suggest that both Seidl and Grisebach seek to intensify the viewing experience using different kinds of shocks. Seidl renders the violence in *Hundstage* shocking by refusing to absolve viewers from the responsibility of the act of looking (on). Grisebach instead uses short, sharp shocks in her depictions of violent acts. I show how both directors use shot length, sound, and framing in ways that may be interpreted as seeking to prompt a heightened sensitivity towards the moving image, and thus infuse the ‘porous interface’ of spectators’ perceptive apparatus. The reading of these two films through Benjamin’s *Schockwirkung* thus represents an original contribution to scholarship on the two

films; furthermore, my definition of a politics of sensitivity illustrates the relevance of the *Kunstwerk* essay for the modern subject in a non-urban setting.

In Chapter One, I asked whether there are there directors who may be seen as responding to the call to arms issued by Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge and if so, which conclusions may be drawn about the politics of the moving image practiced by contemporary German and Austrian filmmakers. The currency of the theories is, I hope, clear from the diverse points of continuation and intersection that I have demonstrated between theory and filmmaking practice. This is quite striking, given that the trajectory that I map spans almost one hundred years. Since the birth of the moving image, modes of film production, distribution and reception have changed beyond recognition, and digital technology has accelerated the rate at which these changes have taken effect and have become commonplace over the past two decades. Such transformations have been described by some scholars as giving rise to a ‘post-celluloid cinema culture’, or an era of ‘post-cinema’, referring, too, to new aesthetic modes of representation that have accompanied the digital turn.¹⁶

Yet this study suggests that the concerns articulated by Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge relating to ‘what cinema *does*, the kind of sensory-perceptual, mimetic experience it enable[s]’, in Hansen’s terms, remain especially relevant in the twenty-first century. Whilst the materiality of the moving image may be changing, its politics remain a site of optimistic contestation for the German-speaking directors studied in this thesis. Film retains its capacity to represent the figure of the worker, to protest against dominant narratives of truth and reality, and to demand that viewers engage intellectually in the creation of meaning. For the directors, the political potential of the medium lies in the capacity of its images to *move* – and transform – its viewers.

¹⁶ See e.g. Georg Seeßlen, *Postkinematografie: Der Film im digitalen Zeitalter* (Berlin: Bertz+Fischer 2013), in which he writes about a ‘Postzelluloid-Kinokultur’ (p. 18); Steven Shaviro, *Post Cinematic Affect* (Winchester: zero books, 2010). Shaviro examines four case studies in order to illustrate formal developments in an age of ‘post cinema’.

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IMAGES APPENDIX



Fig. 1 Angels in the abattoir

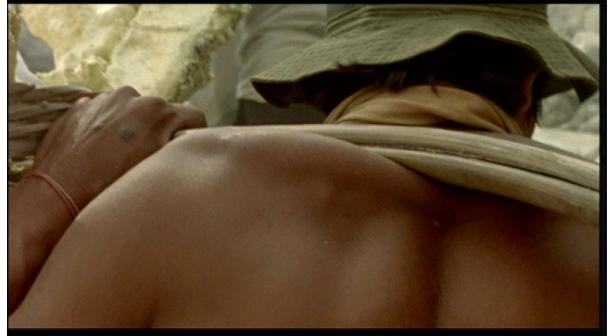


Fig. 2 Fetishising workers' bodies



Fig. 3 Rose-tinting the industrial past



Fig. 4 Factory interior in *Karger*



Fig. 5 Life passes Karger by



Fig. 6 Ulrike's son is visually confined



Fig. 7 Room-to-play for Karger's daughter



Fig. 8 Romantic hero?



Fig. 9 The privileging of the male body



Fig. 10 Unclear context



Fig. 11 The camera pans to observe Sophie's movement



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16 Sophie is absent from the frame



Fig. 17 Camera as observer



Fig. 18



Fig. 19 Photos of non-spaces in Sophie's apartment



Fig. 20 Light from single source visible in the frame



Fig. 21 Artificial light, unidentified sources



Fig. 22 Actors and lay actors together



Fig. 23 Medium close-up/close-up in a long take

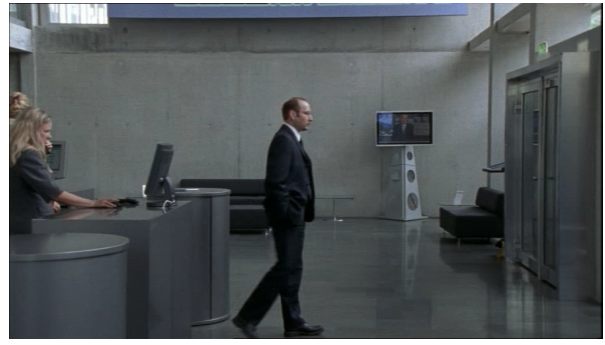


Fig. 24 The camera pans in opposite direction to movement



Fig. 25 Traffic junction in *Marseille*



Fig. 26 Traffic junction in *Wolff von Amerongen*

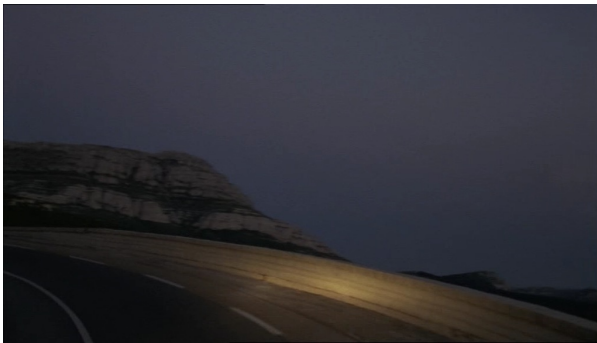


Fig. 27 Sky dominates the frame



Fig. 28 Glacial characters in familial settings

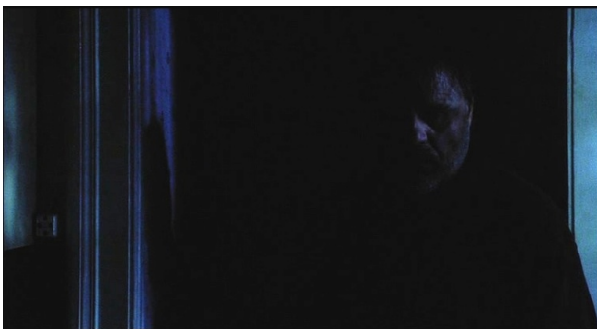


Fig. 29



Fig. 30

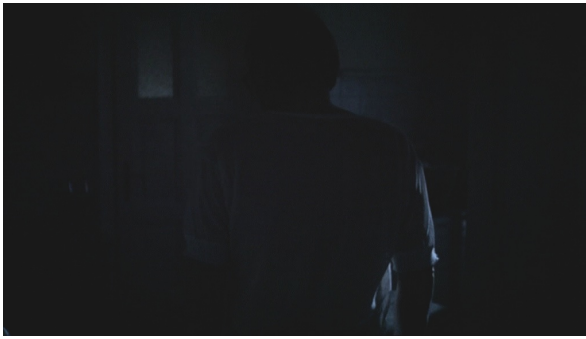


Fig. 31



Fig. 32 Amadou's theatricality



Fig. 33 The routines of fragmented bodies



Fig. 34



Fig. 35



Fig. 36



Fig. 37 Deciphering the film-within-the-film



Fig. 38



Fig. 39



Fig. 40 Closing the shutters



Fig. 41

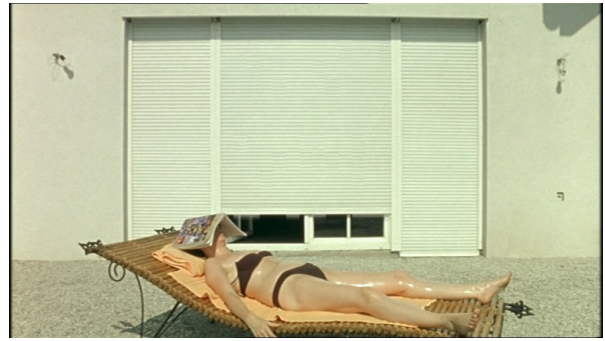


Fig. 42



Fig. 43 A jarring moment for the viewer



Fig. 44 Hruby's tour of dehumanising architectural forms



Fig. 45



Fig. 46 Self-sanctioned imprisonment



Fig. 47



Fig. 48 The violating gaze of a stranger



Fig. 49 The gaze of the third male character

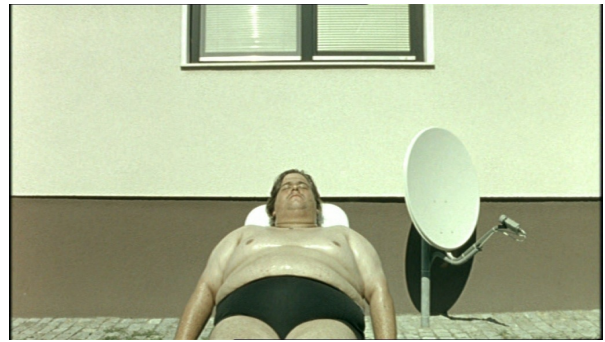


Fig. 50 Bodies



Fig. 51 Preening



Fig. 52 Vivid sounds, concentrated swallowing



Fig. 53 Fragmentary framing



Fig. 54 Fragmented body



Fig. 55 Markus alone



Fig. 56 Cold lighting



Fig. 57 Documentary-style talking head